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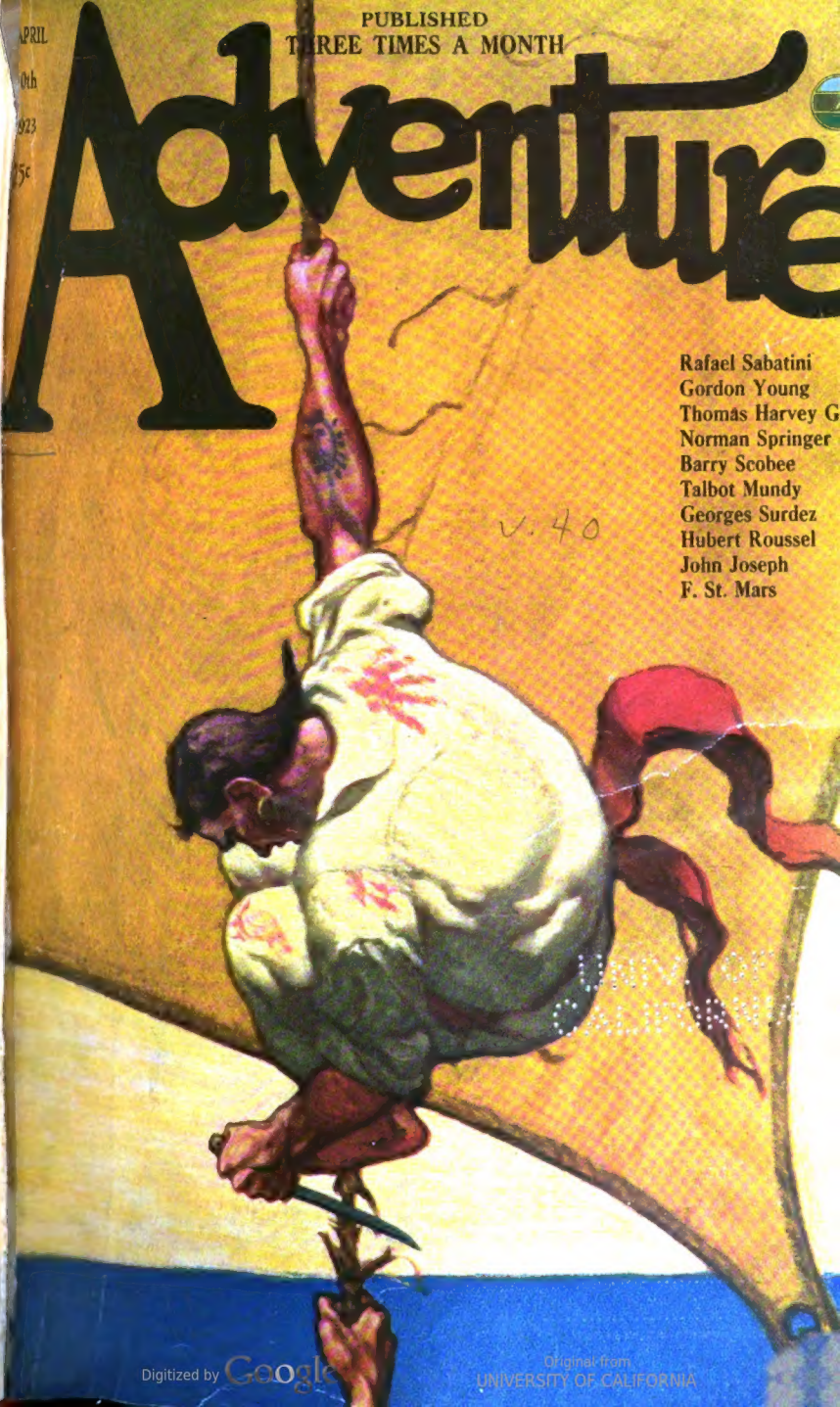

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The Kiss That Burned—

"She bent over him lower—lower—and yet lower—until he could smell the intoxicating perfume of her hair. With every nerve in his body he could feel her nearing presence. . . . She kissed him on the lips. . . . Again she laughed with wicked, eerie glee. . . .

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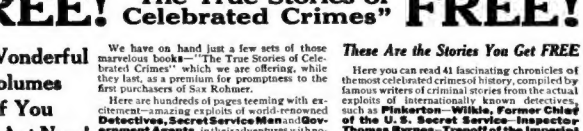

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Headings . . . . . **George M. Richards**

Cover Design . . . . . **A. L. Ripley**

WAR was declared on the greatest empire of history—Great Britain—by one of the feeblest powers in the world—the United States—in June of 1812; and *"Mandan" Ramsay* was sent from St. Louis to warn *Manuel Lisa*, head of the Missouri Fur Company, to hold the upper-Missouri territory for the United States. In "RED AUTUMN," a five-part story by Hugh Pendexter which starts in the next issue, you will read of *Ramsay's* adventures among the tribes of Arikaras, Sioux and Minnetarees, as well as his conflicts with British agents.

THE little Western town of Calumet is at the mercy of a band of cattle-thieves, whose trade-mark is a short piece of sticky rope. Who they are nobody knows. But *"Dusty" Corbett*, the new sheriff, prepares for a round-up and finds at once that he is picked out for the next victim. "STICKY ROPES," is a complete novelette by W. C. Tuttle in the next issue.

FLEEING from the results of a saloon shooting, the cow-hand takes refuge on a lonely ranch; and then across the range again with cowboys in hot pursuit, and the added crime of horse-stealing to answer for. "A TOUCH OF IRISH," a complete novelette by Glynn Bennion, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

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The ETHICS of a FIGHTER

A Complete Novel

by JOHN JOSEPH

Author of "A Fool and His Fiddle," "No Ambition, No Humor, No Feelin's," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE END OF A ROUGH TRAIL

ON THE ground lay a frayed and weather-beaten old saddle. Kneeling on the sandy ground and facing each other across it were two grim-faced, wide-shouldered, suntanned men—"Black Jack" Rogers, foreman of the big Hedges ranch, and Gene Laplante, late of the big woods of the North, but at present employed as a hand on the ranch. Black Jack, pocket-knife in hand, scraped thoughtfully at a dark stain on the leather, while Gene looked on.

"She's sure as —— blood, Frenchy!" Black Jack declared, shortly, glancing suddenly up at Gene.

"Looks so," Gene agreed. "She ees dry, she ees mak like powder when she ees scrape; but me—I am theenk she ees blood—lak you say."

A sweat and dust-plastered buckskin bronco stood close at hand, his head hanging nearly to the ground, his feet spread wide in the weakness of utter exhaustion. His flanks were still heaving, his eyes distressed and his nostrils bloodshot and flaring. Short lengths of broken, hoof-mangled reins hung down from the bridle-bit; the horse's mouth and breast were smeared with bloody foam.

Black Jack rose lithely and turned to the horse, Gene followed.

"That hawse has sure as —— been burnin' the trail!" exclaimed Black Jack, as he slapped the animal heavily with his open hand. The horse quivered in momentary fear, but was too far gone to move from his tracks.

"She ees come ten mile —— queek, I am theenk," said Gene.

"The big end of it, I reckon," agreed Black Jack, "and that means that Dave Hedges is layin' along the trail, somewhere this side of the Rock Creek sheep bridge."

"Unless Antone ees maybe pick heem up," Gene suggested.

"No," returned Black Jack, "it ain't likely. Antone would follow the creek with the sheep; Dave would take the upper trail. It's three miles shorter. It shapes up about like this: Dave helped put the band across the bridge, then Antone hazed the sheep down the creek and the old man struck out

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for home, along the upper trail. Somewhere about the lower end of the Reed place he run up against something. Probably a gun. Anyway, he got bumped out of the saddle and old Buck burnt the trail for home. Dave may be dead, or he may be only hurt and need help. We've got to start quick and move fast. The women will maybe want to go, so you rout Ed out and tell him to rig the blacks to the hack—*pronto!* Then get a rope on Nig and Dandy; I'll tell Blossom and the old woman, then I'll he'p you saddle up. Throw the old man's saddle into the shed as you go."

Rogers ran swiftly toward the house; Gene turned and clutched at the saddle, then muttered an imprecation as it slipped from his hand and tipped against his leg. He stooped again, stiffened suddenly and swore softly, then shouted to Black Jack and waved a beckoning hand as the foreman turned.

Gene said nothing as Black Jack came up, merely pointed at the saddle as he dropped to his knees. A ragged hole showed in the leather in the back of the cantle, nearly in the center. A slight ridge led away from the hole, ranging down and to the left, and terminating in an oblong lump beneath the leather.

"It's a bullet, all right," said Black Jack, tersely, as he dropped to his knees and felt for his pocket-knife. "She went through the leather all easy enough," he added, touching the bullet hole with the point of his knife, "but the steel turned her and she plowed her way along between the leather and the iron to where she is now."

Black Jack split the leather and removed the bullet, then rose to his feet and stood for a moment thoughtfully turning it over in his hand.

"She ees one .30-30, I am theenk," said Gene, rising and taking the slightly flattened bullet from Black Jack's hand as he spoke.

"Not by a long shot," returned Rogers out of a vast experience with guns and bullets. "She's out of an automatic—sure as fate! Now who's got one of them new-fangled shootin' irons around here? Slim Hatfield had one; but he's down in Nevada, I reckon."

"Me? I don' know," replied Gene. "I no see one of those t'ing—long tam now."

Gene passed the bullet over to Black Jack.

"Somebody she ees sure shoot for kill," he added. "Thees 'Hedgehog' she ees maybe feex plenty—thees tam!"

"Looks like it," agreed Black Jack, "but there's a chance. Come, let's move. We're wastin' a lot of good time, foolin' around here. We've got to hunt Dave, right now. The talkin' will keep."

Black Jack ran toward the big house; Gene dragged the saddle into the harness-room and hung it up, then picked out a rope and made his way to the bunk-house.

"How you feel, Ed?" he inquired as he put his head through the door.

A tall young man rolled gingerly from a bunk and limped toward the door, grinning and rubbing his hip as he came.

"Nex' tam," said Gene with a wide grin, "maybe you hobble your stirrup—and tie on couple of pillow—when you try for ride thees leetle Red Bug hawse!"

"Aw, you go to ——, Frenchy," returned Ed with a sheepish grin. "The Red Bug piled me, I admits. But I'll ride that sassy kiuse, yet; and scratch him from —— to breakfast, too! You hear me?"

"Listen," said Gene, suddenly remembering what he had come for. "Ol' Buck she ees come home, and she ees leave the ol' man behind some place. There ees blood on the saddle, and one bullet. Black Jack ees theenk the ol' man ees maybe keeled. He ees say for you to heetch those black hawse to hack—*pronto*. You feel lak heetch up those hawse?"

"Sure I'm all right," replied Ed. "Black Jack thinks the old man got shot out in the hills? Don't that beat ——? Sure, I'll hitch up the team. But say; I reckon you-all ain't aimin' to hunt for Dave in a hack!"

"No," replied Gene, "we ride Nig and Dandy. Thees women, she ees tak thees hack."

Ed secured his hat, then Gene led the way to the corral.

Meantime Black Jack made his way swiftly to the huge, unpainted confusion of wings and verandas and gables and dormer-windows that was known for a hundred miles in the cattle country as "the Hedgehog's brainstorm." He entered without knocking and stood with the door-knob in his hand behind his back. A brown-eyed girl of seventeen stood on the opposite side of a long table, deftly washing the dinner dishes. A bent, prematurely aged woman of fifty stood beside her, struggling with a huge mass of dough that was destined

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presently to become "punk" for the hands. There were traces of former beauty in her lined face; the story of a thousand bitter disappointments, and hopes deferred and finally abandoned, spoke from her listless eyes.

Black Jack hesitated, seemed at a loss how to begin. The girl smiled.

"What do you want, Mr. Rogers?" she asked mockingly. "Want a cooky? Or the key to the whisky-pit? And you might take your hat off, if you're not afraid of taking cold."

Black Jack winced. He wasn't exactly bald, but he hated to be reminded that he was threatened with that condition. He grinned, rather foolishly, and removed his hat, not forgetting to smooth a well-trained wisp of hair across the growing bald spot.

"This ain't no time for foolin', Blossom," he said finally. "Old Buck has just come home—without Dave. There was blood on the saddle, and a bullet in the cantle. I just cut it out. It looks mighty bad for your father, this time."

The girl looked up; a deep flush came swiftly to her face, various emotions seemed to struggle for the mastery. The older woman started, then stared dazedly at Black Jack while she absently rolled the dough from her fingers. Black Jack produced the bullet and stepped close to the table, where he held it out for the women to inspect. Neither made any move to touch it. He watched them, narrowly, finally Mrs. Hedges spoke.

"You think—" she began, then stopped abruptly.

"I think Dave is probably dead," returned Black Jack bluntly.

The older woman sighed deeply. To Rogers it seemed an expression of intense relief. He eyed them both sharply. The girl's face was inscrutable; neither seemed particularly concerned.

"Still, I don't know," Black Jack went on after a moment, "and Dave may be only hurt. But dead or alive he's layin' along the trail, on Rock Creek and somewhere near the lower end of the Reed place. That's the way I've got it sized up. We've got to go and hunt him, right away. I figured that you would want to go, so I've ordered the blacks hitched to the hack. Anyhow we'll need the hack to bring him home. You can drive to Bentley's ford—that's as close as you can get with the hack. Gene and me will fork Nig and Dandy and take the short cut by the upper trail. We've got to move—dark inside of two hours, been wastin' too much time already. What say?

"Very well," returned Mrs. Hedges listlessly, "we'll come as soon as we can."

"Wait at the ford," said Black Jack as he passed out. "We'll meet you there; probably on the short side of two hours."

TEN minutes later Black Jack and Gene rode through the big gate and splashed through the ford across the Two Color River, then headed for the hills at a swinging lope. No word was spoken until the horses slowed to a walk at a steep rise in the edge of the timber two miles from the ranch, then Black Jack turned to Gene and said:

"We'll take it easy up the pitches. Save our hawses and get there all the sooner. The women will wait for us at Bentley's ford. I sent Ed to the store to notify the sheriff and coroner by phone."

"What for you send for thees coroner?" Gene demanded. "You don' know thees Hedgehog ees dead, jus' now."

"I never thought," replied Black Jack. "But it don't matter; he's dead, all right. I've got a hunch. And listen: Cut out that 'Hedgehog' stuff. It don't set good with me!"

"Me? I should call heem *Mister* Hedges, perhaps." Gene's level glance bored straight into Black Jack's menacing eyes. "I don' care one ——," he added. "What Black Jack ees admire, and what he don' admire, she ees no matter for Gene! Onderstan'?"

"The —— you say!"

Black Jack's hand strayed toward his gun, but Gene was unarmed and the gunman presently controlled his rising gorge and spoke more mildly.

"You've been cashin' Dave's checks for quite a spell," he reminded Gene; and that sentence revealed the key-note of Black Jack's character. Loyalty to the Hedges ranch, to Dave Hedges, the master who paid his wages, fed and sheltered him—that was the ruling passion of the man's existence.

"Sure," returned Gene, "I geeve you right. Gene draw hees money, he do hees work, nobody ees injure. But I am theenk, me, thees Hedgehog she ees one —— bad actor! Living, she ees a hog; dead, she ees

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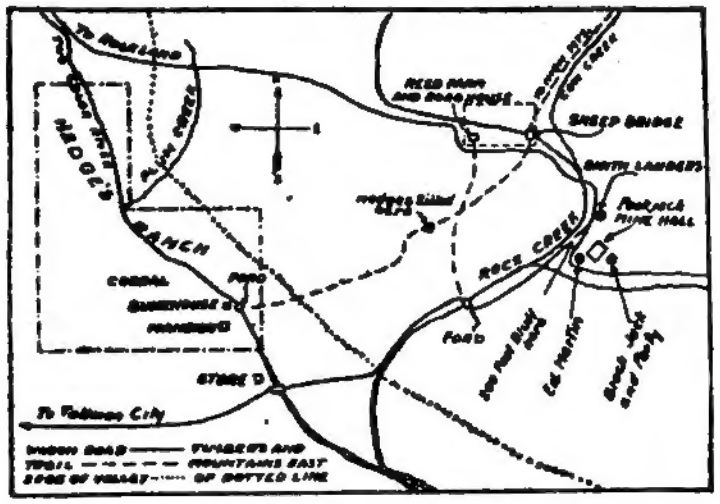
hog jus' the same. Every mans she ees call heem Hedgehog; the name she ees fit like the jug fit whisky. Not?"

Black Jack had been a killer in his day, and he was still a dangerous man. But mixing in with an unarmed man was out of his line. There was no chance for the sort of come-back a fighting man had a right to expect, so what was the use! He accordingly ignored Gene's question and spurred his horse into the level stretch which they had now reached, and a moment later they were plunging down the slope beyond. An hour's hard riding brought them near to the place Black Jack had in mind, and they stopped for a moment to look around and take stock of the situation.

There was heavy timber here; enormous pine and fir-trees towered above them on every side. A steep ascent at their left led to a stupendous cliff, which was evidently the mother of the numerous brood



of immense boulders that lay all about them, half-buried in the sand and rocks, where chance had lodged them in times long past. Several hundred feet below them on the right, dimly glistening through a vista in the forest, Rock Creek roared and tumbled in mad haste on its way to the sea. The trail wound about, here and there among the trees and rocks, and around great logs that lay rotting on the ground.

It was an awe-inspiring scene, at once grand and beautiful, and wild beyond description. Man, with his keen ax and biting saw and rending dynamite had not yet ventured here. For miles to the right and on ahead the mountains rose, step by step, tier upon tier, to end at last in the gray whiteness of the mighty Saw-Tooth Range a dozen miles away. Nature, rioting unmolested for millions of years, had builded here at her own sweet will and left it all for puny man, awe-stricken and silent, to wonder at with uncovered head.

Black Jack, efficient gunman with twenty years of blind service to the ruthless cattle baron, behind him, saw nothing of all this, thought of nothing but the trail ahead and what he dreaded to find lying beside it. Intensely practical at all times, his mind was now wholly concentrated upon the immediate problem and the difficulties which lay directly ahead.

"The trail splits up, here," he said finally, "and runs for half a mile every which-a-way across this tangle. Dave may be layin' almost any place in there, but I've been thinkin' this thing over and I'm betting we find him over near the other side, where the trail takes to the bluff again."

Gene, with his poet's soul and his eye for the beautiful, had been allowing his gaze to rove everywhere, his mission completely forgotten.

"She ees one grand piece scenery!" he said absently. "The Great Hand—she ees not mak many like heem!"

"What the —— are you moonin' about?" Black Jack demanded angrily. "I said that Dave was probably layin' over on the other side of this tangle. They'd lay for him, whoever done it, where they could see him a-comin'. We've got to move lively; it may take some time to find him, and it will be sundown before we know it."

"All right," returned Gene; "lead on, my frien', I follow you. The —— she ees to pay, perhaps, but I am no much skeer, yet."

Black Jack now led off, leaning forward at every turn to peer sharply ahead along the trail. Traveling thus they passed through the tangle and presently came out upon the well-defined trail that led to the Rock Creek sheep-bridge. They made their way slowly for some distance, then, as they turned sharply around a huge boulder, Black Jack's horse shied wildly and plunged viciously ahead. Muttering profanity and savagely plying rein and spur, Black Jack brought the horse to a stand, where he stood quivering while the rider twisted from the saddle and dropped the reins to the ground. Gene dismounted and the two men stood for a moment looking sharply around. The ground pitched steeply down to the right, at this point, and perhaps twenty feet below the trail they presently located the huddled body of a man. It lay face down; one arm was tightly wedged between two

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small trees. Black Jack leaped down the bank, closely followed by Gene, and the two quickly pulled the arm free and turned the body over. This action brought into view the heavy, brutal face of a man perhaps sixty years of age. Blood oozed from the mouth and matted the bristling red beard, the eyes were open and staring. Black Jack made a brief examination, then glanced at the big boulder above the trail.

"Stone-dead!" he said tersely, "and shot down from behind a rock, just like I thought. No use foolin' around; get a hawse down here; we'll tie him to the saddle and get out of here as quick as we can. Better bring Nig. He's the steadiest."

Gene scrambled up the bank; Black Jack picked up the dead man's hat and placed it over his face, then strode impatiently about, muttering and snapping his fingers, while he watched Gene work the horse down the bank.

Getting a heavy body on a nervous horse is no child's play, but it was finally accomplished, and when it had been securely lashed to the saddle Black Jack turned to face Gene.

"Well, Frenchy," he said, "I'm glad that job is done. Now we'll cut across that ridge and follow the creek down to the ford. We're in luck, it ain't more than two mile down there. You ride Dandy and lead Nig, and I'll look around a bit. I've got a hunch I'll find something."

"Not me!" said Gene positively. "Thees job she ees not for me alone. One dead mans and two crazy hawse, leetle too much for Gene. I not try for mak one —— fool—myself. Not me!"

Black Jack seldom made a move without first considering the consequences. As he himself put it; he wanted to know where he was going to get off at, before he got on. He was entirely within his rights in giving orders, but he knew Gene, knew that it would be useless to argue the matter. He was anxious to look the ground over, then and there, but he was superstitious, like most of his kind, and he wanted to get the present spooky job off his hands before dark. There was no time to spare, so he scarcely hesitated in making his decision.

"All right," he said easily, "let it go that way. We'll come back first thing in the mawnin' and look things over. I'll get Dandy and follow you right up."

Black Jack turned, and on the instant a shot rang out, followed by the long drawn-out whine of a ricocheting bullet. Gene dropped Nig's reins and dodged behind a tree; the horse, mad with fright, dashed away through the woods. Black Jack threw himself on the ground, drawing his gun as he went down, then crawled to the shelter of the tree.

"Now what do you think of that?" he demanded as he rose, pistol in hand, beside Gene. "That was a .30-30, and not a hundred yards away!"

"She ees not shoot for kill, this tam," said Gene, pointing a finger at a sizable boulder that stood some distance away. "She ees jus' happen I see leetle dust rise—top side those beeg rock. She ees jus' try for to mak scare. She ees miss hondred feet, by ——!'"

"Like enough you're right," returned Black Jack. "And if that's the case, probably we ain't in much danger. I sure don't like the idea of goin' up against a rifle, with nothing but a six-gun. Not at long range, my friend. Did you hear a laugh?"

"Sure, I hear," replied Gene. "She ees sound lak crazy coyote when he ees mak laugh at the moon. I sleep jus' so well eef I no hear heem some more. She ees mak my hair crawl 'round, by ——!"

"I don't understand it!" exclaimed Black Jack impatiently. "Who in —— is at the bottom of all this, anyhow. I'm plumb beat!"

"Me? I don' know," replied Gene. "Lots of mans she ees lak for kill thees Hedgehog; but me, I can no see why she ees lak for scare —— out of Gene!"

The shadow of a smile showed for an instant in Black Jack's rugged face; Gene often talked about being badly scared, but so far as Black Jack had been able to determine, he had never seen him in that condition. Gene habitually joked in the face of danger, and according to Black Jack's lights a man who did that was not safely to be fooled with beyond a certain point.

"How about those crazy prospectaire?" Gene asked suddenly. "What you call heem, now? Ah, Vanderbilt! Where she ees live?"

"Lives in a cave, over on Thorn Creek. Hunts gold with a peach sprout. Water-witch idea, you know."

"Sure, I hear about those peach sprout," returned Gene. "People ees say thees prospectaire no lak sheep ver' mooch. How you theenk?"

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"By George!" exclaimed Black Jack. "I never thought about him. Still, he's too far away. It's four-five mile over to that tunnel. He don't really live in a cave, you know, it's an old mine tunnel called the Blue Jay."

"Maybe she ees lak you say," Gene conceded, "but crazy mans maybe go hondred mile eef she ees tak notion. Not?"

"Like enough you're right," replied Black Jack. "These old prospectors sure hate sheep, anyway. Kills the grass and don't leave any feed for their pack-horses. And old Van didn't have any reason for lovin' Dave, as I happen to know. He might have killed the old man, all right—but that automatic. That's what beats me! These old-timers wouldn't touch one of them new-fangled guns with a ten-foot pole; so that just about lets Van out. Still, there's no tellin'; we'll keep him in mind. And listen: We've got to get out of here and find that hawse. Want to chance it?"

"Sure, I chance eet," replied Gene. "She ees no shoot for kill, and my hair she ees all lay down smooth again, already."

The men were not molested when presently they stepped cautiously from behind the tree, the facetious marksman evidently having left the neighborhood. Black Jack caught and mounted Dandy, then turned to Gene.

"We'd best split up," he said crisply. "You take down the draw and I'll ride the ridge. There's a big pitch-top pine-tree at the lower end of the ridges; we'll meet there. I'll fire a shot if I run on to Nig."

"She suits me, Mistaire Man," agreed Gene. "Eef I fin' thees hawse, I holler. Eef the holler she ees sound soft and easy—I find thees hawse. Eef she ees sound lak Gene ees runnin' lak ——, I find Vanderbilt! Onderstan'?"

Black Jack grinned and set spurs to his horse; Gene set off down the draw. Perhaps twenty minutes later they met at the big pine. Neither had seen anything of the horse. They set out for the ford, exchanging experiences as they passed along, and presently came out into the open glade surrounding the ford. Black Jack reined in his horse and peered ahead through the growing dusk.

"The women are there, all right," he said, "and it looks like there's a loose hawse, too."

"——!" Gene exclaimed. "She ees that —— Nig hawse. What you theenk 'bout that?"

"I reckon you're right," Black Jack admitted. "We're a couple of pin-heads! Might have knowed he'd come this way, if we'd had any sense."

"Thees womans," said Gene. "Me? I am theenk she ees have one sorry tam watching these hawse carry dead mans all aroun' lak that!"

"Tough luck, and that's a fact," returned Black Jack.

Black Jack now rode on and caught the horse, and the two men presently approached the hack, where the women sat huddled together on the front seat. It was a peculiar situation, there was something weird about it; for some unaccountable reason nobody spoke. The girl sprang lightly to the ground and stood a little apart while the men unlashed the body and transferred it to the hack. The older woman sat rigidly holding the lines and staring straight at the team. When the gruesome task had been completed the girl refused to ride in the hack, nor would she ride the horse that had carried the dead man. Gene accordingly mounted the black, and the girl, declining Black Jack's assistance, skilfully mounted the other horse and the two rode on ahead.

Black Jack climbed into the hack and took the lines from the woman, eying her keenly as he did so. He spoke sharply to the team, turned them around in the grating gravel and crossed the ford, and a moment later they were speeding toward the ranch at a swinging trot. They rode some distance in silence, then the woman turned a tired face to Black Jack and said—

"No use askin', of course — he's dead?"

"Yes," replied Black Jack simply, "he's dead."

CHAPTER II

GENE SPEAKS HIS MIND

DAVE HEDGES had come to the end of the trail. For twenty-five years he had terrorized the country, and at last, quite fittingly by his own favorite method, his career had been ended. A pioneer in the cattle business, shrewd, persistent, ruthless, he had forged ahead of all the others and in time came to be acknowledged

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king of them all in the hundred-mile-square country that was known as the "Two Color Range." Later on, when the sheep threatened his range, he had fought them savagely to the last.

He had employed Black Jack, at that time a notorious gun-fighter, and gathered about him a reckless, dare-devil band of riders who stopped at nothing. Thus equipped he had been able to hold the sheep at bay for years. But at last the time came when he could no longer stem the tide, and after a last bloody battle in which Hedges himself had been severely wounded, he gave up the fight.

Other cattlemen gave up entirely and drifted out to the irrigated sections, or over to the Coast, but this would not be Dave Hedges' way. Instead, he swallowed his pride and bought sheep. By tens of thousands he bought them, then the price of wool and mutton went sky-rocketing and, overnight it might almost be said, he found himself a near millionaire. But just as the sheep had spelled ruin to his cattle business, the homesteaders now came on to threaten his sheep. Settlers, here and there, each with a few cows and horses, would, if unmolested, soon take the country. So a new contest came on, no less bitter than the first, but destined to end quickly.

Black Jack Rogers, as the name implies, was swarthy of skin and black as an Indian in the matter of hair and eyes. Above medium height, broad of shoulder, deep through the chest, keen-eyed and alive in every inch of him—he was a formidable looking man. He scorned all such things as woolly chaps, high-heeled boots and fancy saddles; and his only vanity was a big, flowing black mustache. Almost totally lacking initiative in a business way, he was nevertheless highly efficient under orders. He believed in the boss as a dog believes in his master; and like all of his kind he disclaimed all major responsibilities, put everything of importance up to his master. To him, life was a game in which the best man won, be it a gun-fight or a mighty battle for a fortune on the range. The law? Well, a man obeyed the law—if convenient—otherwise he did as he pleased and took his chance. Withal, Black Jack Rogers was a man who in all things drove straight at the mark, lived according to his lights and was incapable of doing a thing if he believed it to be wrong.

Having reluctantly "throwed in" with the sheep, Black Jack turned his attention to making life miserable for the newly arrived homesteaders. Led by him, Hedges' men terrorized the country for twenty miles around. If no resistance was offered they contented themselves with burning stacks and stables and cutting fences, and shooting stock or running them over the mountains. On the other hand, if a settler showed fight he became a marked man. Defending a home with a gun meant, soon or late, the burning of the house or even murder. The authorities, fifty miles away at the county seat, were powerless, for masked men riding at night are not easily identified. Every one knew in a general way who they were, but proof that would stand in court was wholly lacking.

All such things must come to an end, however, and in this case it came with a startling crash that amazed the whole countryside. At nine o'clock one evening Hedges' men were gathered in the bunk-house, laughing, shouting, drinking, beginning a Christmas Eve carousal; at ten they all lay dead. Arsenic, the doctors said.

It was common opinion that some abused and despoiled settler had switched jugs on them and substituted poisoned whisky, but the responsibility never has been fixed, and the poisoning doubtless belongs to that class of rare crimes which are never brought home to any one.

This event marked the end of open warfare. Black Jack and Hedges had escaped by the merest chance, being detained in the big house by a visiting neighbor, and neither was now in a frame of mind to renew the feud. Henceforth Hedges seemed satisfied to hew pretty close to the line of the law, and organized, open violence became a thing of the past. Bitter animosities remained, however, and now as a result, three years after the bunk-house tragedy, Dave Hedges had at last paid the piper.

A particularly exasperating thorn in Dave Hedges' side had been the Reed homestead heretofore mentioned. Dan Reed had taken up four forties along Rock Creek, and in so doing had acquired the legal right to fence Hedges away from his sheep-bridge. Hedges had been at much expense in building this bridge, and looked upon the fencing of it as an outrage and a distinct interference with his rights. Reed's

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was the legal right, of course, but Hedges, when the time came and he wished to use the bridge, deliberately cut the fence and drove a band of sheep across. Reed came upon him as the last of the sheep were crossing, and sent him home with a bullet in his hip. Some weeks later Reed's wife found him dead in the woods, with a five-foot pine tree lying across his chest. Reed had been getting out his Winter's wood and might have dropped the tree upon himself, but he was a good woodsman and not at all likely to get in the way of a falling tree, and his friends were therefore little surprized when they rolled the log away and discovered that he had been shot through the heart. Beyond question Reed had been murdered, and, while there was no tangible evidence to indicate the guilty person, many believed that Dave Hedges had done the shooting, and then, in sheer devilish malignance had dropped the tree to mangle the body.

After Reed's death Hedges cut the fence whenever it pleased him to do so; and the widow patiently repaired it, while carefully avoiding a meeting with the brutal, headstrong stockman, and it was thus that matters stood at the time of Hedges' death.

The Hedges ranch force was now composed almost entirely of law-abiding young men who had been raised in the Two Color Valley—mere boys of eighteen or twenty who looked upon the more or less reformed Black Jack as a great hero. These reckless young men, habitually intolerant of orders, defiant of all restraint, holding little reverence for the usual conventions, were ordinarily a hard bunch to handle. For one thing, however, they held a genuine respect, and that was a real man. And whatever Black Jack's reputation might have been in other respects, no man in all the Two Color country would have denied him the right to be called a real man. The boys therefore fairly idolized him, looked up to him, obeyed his orders without question. If Black gave an order, that was enough, it was carried out without a murmur.

Dave Hedges had completely abandoned the cattle business, and the sheep-herders were all Mexicans, but there were still twelve to fifteen Americans always employed as camp-tenders, teamsters and day hands, and to look after some two hundred head of horses on the range. Ed Martin was Black Jack's right hand man, and had charge of the horses on the range. Andy Phelps, a red-headed, never serious youth of twenty, looked after the camp-tenders and their outfits. Emery Slade, Mrs. Hedges' reckless, bow-legged, green-eyed nephew, drove the roustabout team and served as corral boss. Gene Laplante was field-boss at the ranch.

"The Store," which stood near the bank of the Two-Color River and perhaps half a mile south of the Hedges ranch buildings, contained the post-office and was the daily and nightly meeting-place of the population for many miles around. Not all of them met there every day, of course, but these hard-riding natives thought nothing of "forking" a horse and riding a dozen miles for an hour or two of friendly banter and gossip over the latest neighborhood news. The young men of the ranch often spent their evenings there, and after supper on the day when Hedges' body had been brought in from the hills, they set out promptly for the store to make the most of the sensation, leaving Black Jack and Gene together in the bunk-house.

GENE leaned far back in his favorite chair, with his feet on a table, placidly smoking his pipe; Black Jack paced nervously to and fro and gave voluble tongue to the subject of Dave Hedges' mysterious death. Ordinarily he had little to say, and that straight to the point. But, like many of his type, a few drinks loosened his tongue and he talked endlessly. Hedges had been a heavy drinker and always kept a bountiful supply of liquor in the "whisky-pit," which was a cubbyhole opening from the main basement under the big house. Black Jack evidently had been sampling pretty freely tonight, and the whisky talked with a nimble tongue.

"She's sure one —— of a puzzle!" he said, pausing for a moment and scowling down at Gene. "There's a dozen people might have done it, but when you trace the thing out she simmers down to just about two. Slim Hatfield would be a likely one—him and Dave had a mixup four-five years back and Slim swore he'd get Dave, some time—but Slim's down in Nevada, by all accounts, and that seems to let him out. A lot more of 'em swore, one time and another, to kill Dave, but the more I study it over the more she whittles down

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to two men. One of them is Smith Landers, and the other is old Vanderbilt. One or t'other of them two done it, and I'm layin' a good bet I'll know which one before tomorrow night."

"What for thees Landers boy weesh for kill thees Hedgehog?" Gene demanded shortly.

"I'll tell you," replied Black Jack. "He stole some bells off the milk-cows, three-four year ago, and Dave cut him up with a quirt. It was like this: Dave accused him of it, and the kid called him a liar. Then Dave cut him across the face with the quirt. The cussed fool just stood and took it, and every time Dave cut him the kid called him a liar again. Of course Dave cut him up pretty bad before he quit. You couldn't expect anything else—with the —— fool callin' him a liar at every lick."

"How thees Hedgehog know thees boy steal them bell?" Gene inquired.

"Maybe he didn't know it," replied Black Jack. "But the boy's a born thief; he's been caught in the act a dozen times, and he was seen in the pasture the day the bells was took. He got 'em, all right; no doubt about it."

"Well," said Gene, "I am hear thees quirt she ees put out one of thees boy's eye, that tam. Everybody ees say thees boy only got half-sense, too. I am theenk —me—that thees Hedgehog 'ave —— leetle business for cut heem up lak you say!"

"He only got what was comin' to him," replied Black Jack, hotly. "The whole —— tribe ought to be run out of the country. They're all thieves—these homesteaders. They've got to steal. Nobody can make a livin' on one of them dinky little homesteads. It can't be done!"

Black Jack resumed his pacing; Gene settled back and puffed thoughtfully at his pipe, casting a surreptitious glance at Black Jack from time to time.

"You speak about thees leetle widow womans one tam," Gene presently ventured. "What name, now? Ah, Reed. Mees' Reed. How she ees mak living, now her husband ees gone?"

"Lord only knows," replied Black Jack. "They used to keep a road-house. Made a livin', I reckon, as long as the Packjack Mine was runnin'; but the mine has been shut down for two year now, and I don't suppose she takes in five dollars a month. There's a cracking good power site on the place, though, and I reckon that's what she's hangin' on for.

"And that shows just how crooked these homesteaders are, too. Reed never took that place up with any idea of farmin' it; he grabbed it on account of that power site, and nothing else. Aimed to sell it to the Packjack outfit, you know. And he called it a farm! That's what makes a stockman so —— hot. Farm? Judas Cripes! There ain't enough farmin' land on it for two turtles to fight on! The woman's got sand, though; I'll say that for her—stayin' there all alone except for a four-year-old kid."

"I am theenk me she ees one brave leetle womans for stay there, five miles from nex' house," said Gene. "And thees bear and lion? How she ees get along weeth thees? I lak for see thees lady, me."

Black Jack ignored Gene's question and turned to the door. He stood looking out for a moment, then resumed his pacing.

"It's a —— of a world!" he presently continued. "When a man like Dave Hedges, that's always been a man and paid his debts and made this country what it is, gets shot down by some —— homesteader hidin' behind a rock. I'm sick of it all! I put in ten years tryin' to head off the cussed sheep; I put in seven more tryin' to save the country from these crazy homesteaders. And what did I get out of it? A little bacon, a few beans, a little tobacco, a drink of whisky now and then, and maybe a ton of lead slugs throwed in my direction, one time and another. Some of them slugs got home, too. There's five of 'em I can call to mind, right now, off-hand. I'm askin' you again—what good did it all do? The sheep took the country, didn't they? And now the homesteaders have got it. Every little creek has got a shoestring ranch along it, and the big ones have got from three to a dozen. Every water-hole in the country is fenced up, and some of these lunatics has even gone way back in the big timber and took up ranches where they can't raise enough to winter a packjack on. This Reed place is one of them. ——! I might as well have been settin' in the bunk-house all this time, playin' mumbly-peg for all the good I done.

"I tell you I'm through! I've been goin' by a bell for twenty years. Gettin' up at four in the mawnin'—by a bell; goin' to

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breakfast—by a bell; dinner—by a bell; supper—by a bell. Seems like I been hearin' that blasted bell ringin' every five minutes for a hundred years! And I'm through. Get me? Through!

"Where's a man go'n'ta wind up at?" Black Jack checked his marching and glared down at Gene. "I'll tell you where; if he keeps on goin' like I've been goin', he'll wind up in a home for feeble-minded old stiffs, somewhere."

Gene smiled. Black Jack continued his march.

"Feeble-minded old stiffs," he repeated, delighted with the phrase. "How would you like to take a slant at old Black Jack a-settin' in a rockin'-chair, and somebody feedin' him bread and milk out of a bowl. Bread and milk with a spoon, out of a bowl. That's what it's comin' to!

"I've been plannin' ever since Dave tied into this sheep business, to get out of it, and stay out. I hate it! I couldn't start in to tell you how I hate it! If I had a little money I could buy that Sutton forty and be my own boss, for once. There's plenty of water—a man could make a livin', anyhow. But what can a man do on sixty a month? Why, nothing, of course. Nothing but what I did do—go to town once a month and blow her in, and then come back and listen to the clatter of the same danged old bell for another month.

"I'm aimin' to get out of it mighty sudden now. With a little luck I'll make it. Mrs. Hedges is going to offer five thousand reward, and I'm going to win it and buy the Sutton forty next day. Then I'm going to put up a bell and hire a man to ring it every mawnin' at four o'clock; and I'm going to have the soo-preme pleasure of stickin' my head out of the window and tellin' him to go to —— every mawnin' for the next ten years."

"You theenk thees womans offer thees beeg reward, lak you say?" Gene put in. "I lak for see that! Me? I am theenk thees womans, and thees gal, too, they feel lot better, now thees Hedgehog she ees tak long treep."

"She done offered it already," replied Black Jack. "Sent the message to the store by Ed Martin. Old man Stevenson will phone it to the *Gazette*, and you will see it in the paper tomorrow night."

"Maybe she ees lak you say," Gene admitted. "But me? I no see what for she ees offer reward lak that. Thees womans lot better off now thees Hedgehog she ees gone. She ees one —— bad actor, thees Hedgehog, I am theenk. Tak look at thees fine house. She ees cost maybe feefty t'ousan' dollar. How she ees come here? Ah, thees Hedgehog she ees dronk, one tam! One mans she ees mak fun of old house thees Hedgehog she ees mak mad lak ——; so she ees go to Tollman City and mak contrac' for ver' fine new house for cost feefty t'ousan' dollar. Nex' day she ees sober, she ees try for break thees contrac'. But she ees too tight, he can not break. So the house she ees built, and after she ees finish, thees hog she ees too —— stingy for buy leetle paint!

"Tak look inside. What you see? Empty! Not one —— teeng in it—only what she ees move from old house. Thees womans she ees jus' slave! She ees cook for beeg lot of mans on one leetle stove lak I have for keep batch on, far back een beeg woods. I carry heem t'ousan' mile, one hand, by ——! Thees woman she ees been jus' one dog for thees Hedgehog. Me? I no see what for she geev beeg reward. Me? I geev thees money to thees party which kill heem!"

Black Jack paced the floor and gnawed at his mustache, while Gene spoke his mind. Several times he stopped near Gene and seemed about to interrupt, but each time thought better of it and resumed his pacing. Gene was a pleasant-looking fellow; handsome, a woman would say, with his curly brown hair, big brown eyes and regular features. But good-natured as Gene looked, there was something else there, too. A serene expression about the eyes, a balance, an equilibrium about the man, that always caused Black Jack to hesitate when hot words came into his mind. As a matter of fact Black Jack was a trifle in awe of the well-poised Gene, though he was scarcely aware of it himself. So he said nothing and soothed himself by taking another drink. Gene refused to join him.

"Thees Hedgehog dronk all the tam, too, since I come here," Gene presently continued. "Sometam she ees raise —— weeth thees womans. Four-five tam I see hees wife and thees gal tak for brush—hot foot! I have watch heem, and I am theenk sometam the play she ees come up right, maybe,

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and I knock those spot off thees peeg, myself!"

"You're all wrong," declared Black Jack when Gene finally left off and felt for his tobacco pouch. "You're all wrong, but I'm not going to argue about it tonight. I'm going to bed and get a good night's sleep, and tomorrow I'm going to cop that reward."

CHAPTER III

HOBNAILS AND EMPTY SHELLS

NOTWITHSTANDING his declaration about sleep, Black Jack lay awake for hours, studying his problem. He had been a gun-fighter; in his younger days he had fought for the sheer joy of it and for the notoriety it brought him; but of late years he had fought only when necessity drove, and some particular object was to be accomplished. He was weary of it now, the sheep had persistently sapped at his nerve and he fervently wished to get away to some quiet place and live in peace and quiet. He was still on the sunny side of forty, but he had lived in a tumult of excitement and furious action, and in experience the man was a hundred years old. Life had been more or less of a torture to him for years, for he hated sheep as he hated nothing else on earth. It was ingrained—seemed a part of his very flesh and bones—this hatred of sheep.

The Summers were not so bad when the sheep were all out in the hills, but the Winters had been a hell on earth. There had been times when he was half-crazed by the all-day-and-night bleating of the sheep, and only his steadfast loyalty to his master had kept him going. Of course he might have called for his time any day of all these years, but it simply was not in the man to desert, or dodge what he conceived to be his duty. As long as Dave Hedges needed him he would be there to do what he could, to the end, no matter what it was.

But now that Hedges was dead he felt absolved of further duty to the ranch. He was loyal to Hedges, even in death, and felt it his duty to hunt down the murderer at any cost, but the ranch might go to the —— as far as he was concerned. If the women had any sense they'd sell out and go to some town and live as women ought to live. If they elected to stay on the ranch and herd sheep, well and good—but they'd have to look out for themselves, and that's all there was to it.

So Black Jack lay awake in his bunk and planned. Everything hinged on that reward. If he could land that—and he firmly believed that he could—everything would be all right. He could buy the Sutton forty and live in peace. If he failed—Well, things would look pretty black, but in one thing he was fully resolved—never again would he work for wages and be a slave to some man's bell!

BLACK JACK was astir early on the following morning and, after a few terse orders to the hands, went at once to the mansion for a conference with Mrs. Hedges. He did not like it, had no confidence whatever in any woman's judgment outside of her own domain which, according to Black Jack's views, was strictly confined to the house; but the widow was boss now and must be consulted whether or no.

The women were busy preparing breakfast when Black Jack stepped into the kitchen. The older woman looked up, inquiringly. Black Jack went straight to the point.

"I've come for orders," he said shortly. "You're boss now; what's the program?"

The woman's mind had been running upon other matters; it had never occurred to her that Black Jack would be coming to her for orders. She hesitated, puzzled.

"I suppose you're right," she ventured finally. "I hadn't thought about it. What was it you wanted to know about?"

"Well," replied Black Jack, "Dave's been killed. Some rotten coward laid behind a rock and shot him down, and we've got to find out who done it. I want to see the cur that done it, hangin' by the neck—I want to see it with my own eyes. There's a reward, too. I want that, if I can get it. I reckon it's all right—if I earn it."

"Yes," replied the woman, "you've got just as much right to it as anybody, if you earn it."

"All right, that's understood between us. And now, this inquest—it's set for three o'clock, I believe you said?"

"Yes, the doctor will be here at ten to—to do his work; the inquest will be at three."

"All right," said Black Jack, "and now this ground—the place where Dave was

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killed—it ought to be looked over, right away, while the signs are fresh. The doctor won't need me for what he's got to do, and the sheriff won't be here before noon. So I want to take Gene and hit the trail right after breakfast. We'll be back in plenty of time for the inquest. What say?"

The woman agreed and Black Jack went at once to the bunk-house to put the matter up to Gene. He could not have explained to himself why he wanted Gene along, and it might mean sharing the reward; but he had confidence in the level-headed Gene and he dreaded going to the place alone. With live men he was prepared to deal, no matter what came up, but with dead men it was different, and even the spot where his master had been killed had something dreadful about it.

"What for?" Gene demanded when Black Jack had made his proposal. "What for should I go look for thees party? I don' care eef somebody ees kill forty Hedgehog! Me? I geeve nice present to thees party which kill heem! I no go for hang somebody—not me!"

"But," Black Jack protested, "they laid for him—somebody; laid for him and shot him down from behind a rock. It's murder, I tell you, and somebody has got to hang for it!"

"All right," returned Gene easily, "maybe she ees lak you say. Ver' good! You go ketch heem, put heem een thees jail, hang heem eef you lak. But me? I tak some nice posy for thees party when she ees lock up een thees jail!"

Black Jack continued his argument, enlarged upon the atrocious nature of the crime, finally proposed to divide the reward in case of success in rounding up the killer. Gene stood in an attitude of deep thought while Black Jack talked.

"Ver' good," he said finally, "I do eet. She ees look good."

Black Jack smiled. He thought that his argument had won Gene over. But Gene had heard scarcely a word of it. Something radically different was running in his mind; something of which Black Jack had no slightest suspicion—yet.

The breakfast bell now interrupted them, and when that little matter had been attended to they saddled their horses, and an hour or so later they arrived at the big boulder where Black Jack's horse had shied the day before.

"We'd better drop down and work back from below," said Black Jack, as they dismounted directly above the spot where the body had been found. "We'll go slow and not overlook anything. We've got to be careful about tramping out evidence."

Gene glanced sharply at another huge boulder which stood just above the trail and perhaps a hundred feet ahead.

"All right," he said, "you go below, I look on thees top side."

"Be careful, and don't muss things up," Black Jack admonished, as he slipped down the steep bank.

Gene went on to the big boulder and with the aid of some bushes scrambled up and around to the upper side of it. He glanced keenly at the ground, bent far over with his hands on his knees, then muttered a husky French oath and dropped to his knees. There were fresh tracks here, sharply defined in the moist earth. He ran a finger absently around in the depression made by the shoe-heel, then clutched swiftly at a small, faintly glistening object that lay half-concealed in a tuft of grass. A mere glance satisfied him that it was an automatic pistol shell, and that it had been fired quite recently. He rose to his feet, slipped the shell into his pocket and began a hasty search. Four more similar shells were presently added to his collection, then Gene turned his attention to the tracks.

It seemed clear that the person who had made these tracks had killed Dave Hedges, and that he had made no attempt whatever to cover his trail. Gene pondered for a moment, then set about systematically to destroy the telltale tracks. He walked slowly about, setting his foot down carefully and throwing his weight heavily upon it at each step. In this manner he followed a row of tracks to a bed of shale which lay perhaps a hundred feet up the hill. Then, after satisfying himself that the trail could not be followed in the shale, he turned about and, pursuing the same method, followed another row of tracks back to the big boulder. He paused here to examine the ground again, briefly, then peered around the boulder and perceived Black Jack crawling around on hands and knees some distance below the trail. He smiled, then, putting his thumb to his nose, he waved derisive fingers at Black Jack, while he muttered French profanity.

Gene presently rubbed his face vigorously

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with both hands, as if to erase any telltale expression that might otherwise linger to betray him, then slipped down the bank to where Black Jack, still on his knees, was examining the ground.

"You find anything?" Gene inquired as he came up.

"I found plenty," replied Black Jack tersely as he rose to his feet. "That Landers kid has been here, sure as ——! He fired at least one shot, too. I found the shell. But what stumps me—this empty shell is a .25-20! That's Smith Landers' rabbit gun, all right, but Dave was shot with an automatic pistol. I'd swear to that bullet I cut out of the saddle."

Black Jack fished around in his pocket and presently produced the bullet in question and the shell he had lately picked up.

"You see, she don't near fit," he said as he presented the bullet to the open end of the shell. "I don't understand it. There's something we ain't on to, yet. But the kid was here—I know that. I'd know them hobnails anywhere. Take a look at this track, here. You see, them nails are wide, and they've got flat heads. People around here don't use that kind. They ain't on sale at all. Now Smith Landers sent to Chicago for them boots, and he had 'em nailed before they sent 'em. Probably a dozen people saw him get them from the post-office, and we've got him dead to rights, that far, even if he destroys the boots. He was here, and he done some shootin'. We can prove that much, anyhow, and all we've got to do is to go slow and we'll get him right!"

Gene smiled, surreptitiously.

"Where thees boy ees shoot from?" he inquired.

"From behind that stump there," replied Black Jack, pointing. "He tramped all around there. Must have been waitin' around for half an hour or more, judging from the tracks."

"But thees bullet, een thees saddle, she ess range down," Gene objected. "Eef thees kid she ees shoot up thees hill, lak you say, thees bullet she ees range up, too. Not? How you explain that?"

"I don't explain it," returned Black Jack, doubtfully. "Looks like there must have been two of— Say! What did you find up there above the trail?"

"I find nothing," replied Gene easily. "The ground she ees smooth lak water een a well."

"Well then, that's settled," said Black Jack, "and the shootin' was all done from here. That means that young Landers done it all, and if he did he had another gun along. Looks like the kid's maybe a —— sight slicker than anybody give him credit for. But how about that bullet? How the —— could a bullet range down if it was fired from here?"

"Thees hawse she ees maybe rear up," Gene suggested.

"Of course!" exclaimed Black Jack. "That's it exactly. Why didn't I think of that? But wait! That won't do either. A bullet fired from here would maybe range down, if the hawse was rearin' up, but if the old man was going toward home it would be in the right hand side of the saddle. This bullet was in the left side."

Black Jack tipped his hat back and scratched his head thoughtfully while he stared at the ground.

"She's a riddle, all right," he said finally, "but I reckon the hawse might have turned around. Suppose Landers took a shot at Dave, just before he got even with the stump? Like enough old Buck would turn and bolt; Dave would yank on the reins and the hawse would rear up. That would shape things up so the next shot might strike in the left side of the saddle and range down. I reckon that's just about the way it happened. Let's have a look at that trail."

The men now climbed the bank, and at a point near Gene's boulder they came upon unmistakable evidence that a horse had lately been pitching wildly about for some time; and the tracks indicated that most of the plunging had taken place with the rider facing the boulder. To Gene it appeared clear that some one lying in wait behind the boulder had either taken a shot at Hedges, or had challenged him, and that Hedges had thereupon whirled his horse around to face his enemy. Probably there had been a duel to the death at less than five paces. Black Jack was not so well-informed, however, and to him the tracks told a wholly different story.

"By ——!" Gene presently exclaimed. "Thees hawse she ees turn roun' four-five tam. Not?"

"Sure thing," Black Jack agreed. "It's all plain enough, now. Smith camped

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behind that stump, and when Dave come along he went to shootin'. Dave pulled his gun, and old Buck went to plungin' like—Say! We've been a couple of locoed—— fools? What become of Dave's gun? He didn't have none on him when we picked him up; not even a ca'tridge belt. And I never thought about it till now! Don't it beat ——? I ain't wrong, am I? He didn't have no gun on him, did he? We didn't drop it getting the body on the hawse?"

"Sure, I no see any gun," replied Gene; "maybe he didn't have hees gun along thees tam?"

"Not on your life!" declared Black Jack positively. "Nobody ever saw Dave without a gun on him. Might as well expect to find him ridin' around in the woods without any pants on! No, sir! That gun was took off him after he was shot—or he might have dropped it in the fight. But that ca'tridge belt was took off afterward. You can bet on that! But it don't make any difference; the kid got him, and he was a dang sight slicker than anybody'd think for, with his two guns. You see how it was? Landers emptied his automatic and Dave was still in the saddle, so he grabbed up his rifle and finished the job with that. The cowardly cur was behind that stump and Dave didn't have a show on earth. I'll bet a horse that Doc finds a .25-20 bullet in Dave's body, and maybe more than one. Come on, let's go; we've got him dead to rights and there's nothing more to do here."

"How you feel so sure thees boy do all thees?" Gene demanded. "Thees jury go'n' talk long tam maybe before she ees hang mans on thees bullet and thees shell and thees tracks."

"Maybe so," returned Black Jack, "but I'd know them hobnails anywhere, and Landers has got a gun this shell will fit. And besides that, he swore he'd kill Dave some day, and we can prove that by a dozen witnesses. Anyhow, he'll spill the whole story when the sheriff gets after him."

Gene treated himself to a smile on the sly.

"She ees all ver' fonny," he said musingly. "These Landers boy she ees carry automatic pistol and .25-20 rifle; then somebody, yesterday, she ees tak leetle shot close by, and Black Jack she ees say eet ees one .30-30. Ver' fonny! Not?"

Black Jack glanced sharply at Gene.

"Does look funny that way," he admitted. "I'd swear that was a .30-30 yesterday. Anyhow it wasn't the .25-20. That much is certain. We don't seem to be at the bottom of this business yet."

Gene smiled again, but whatever might have been running in his mind he said nothing, and the men now mounted and rode back to the ranch.

Arriving at the ranch they turned the horses into the corral and put away their saddles, then Black Jack went on to the house to report to Mrs. Hedges. Gene tarried in the shed, and as soon as Black Jack was safely out of the way he picked out a rope and slipped back to the corral. He roped Old Buck, then passed around to the right side and ran his hand lightly along the animal's ribs.

"By ——!" he exclaimed softly as the horse flinched away from his hand. "She ees lak I theenk. One bullet she ees burn thees rib lak ——! We no look ver' close on thees hawse, before. By ——! Thees people no tak ver' much chance on thees Hedgehog. I am theenk, me, I go tak leetle look on thees widow womans what Black Jack talk about."

Gene smiled as he turned the horse loose, then coiled the rope and made his way to the big house, tossing the rope in the shed as he passed.

CHAPTER IV

THE LITTLE WIDOW

THE hour for the inquest was at hand, and a large crowd had gathered. They thronged the big verandas and spilled over into the yard and crowded the immense dining-room, where the body had been laid out on a rough board table. Lacking chairs the crowd stood, three or four deep along the walls. The coroner, the doctor and a deputy sheriff occupied chairs near the table; Black Jack and the sheriff stood nearby and carried on a lively discussion in whispers.

The old prospector known as Vanderbilt, a bent, haggard, gray-bearded man of sixty, was a conspicious figure in a little group that stood near the door leading to the front veranda. The man's face was deeply lined, a grease-matted tangle of gray hair hung about his shoulders, his eyes gleamed with the strange fires of near insanity. He spoke to no one, but, keen-eyed and alert he watched the proceedings from beginning to end and let no word escape him.

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Smith Landers, a thin-chested, gangling youth of perhaps nineteen, stood lounging against the wall near the kitchen door. The boy's face was long and narrow, his chin weak; quite clearly he belonged to the type that is called "sub-normal" in the matter of intellect. A black patch, held in place by a greasy shoestring, partially concealed the fact that his left eye was missing from its socket.

The sheriff, a big, competent-looking old-timer, presently approached the deputy and whispered something in his ear. The deputy lounged carelessly out to the veranda, but almost immediately reappeared from the direction of the kitchen and took his stand in the doorway.

The coroner now called the house to order and declared the "court" in session. There was little or no formality; a jury was quickly selected and occupied a bench near the table.

The doctor, a thick-necked, bullet-headed little man was the first witness called. Stripped of its technical verbiage and boiled down to a sentence, he stated that he had performed an autopsy and that Dave Hedges had died from the effect of "gunshot wounds." He had extracted four bullets from the body, any one of which would, in his opinion, have caused death in a short time. At the conclusion of his testimony the doctor produced the bullets and passed them over to the coroner.

Black Jack was now called. He testified to the finding of the bullet in the saddle, and related the circumstances connected with the recovery of the body, then produced the bullet he had just described and turned it over to the coroner. He then described the tracks he had found near the scene of the tragedy, paying special attention to the hobnails, and went on to tell about the finding of the empty .25-20 shell. He passed the shell to the coroner, then related the quirting incident in which Smith Landers had lost an eye. He sprang to his feet at this point and, pointing dramatically at Landers, declared that he had often sworn to kill Dave Hedges.

Landers had so far appeared stolidly unconcerned, but his jaw dropped now, and after staring for a moment at Black Jack he put his hat on and turned hastily toward the door. The deputy blocked the way, however, and promptly placed the boy under arrest.

Gene was presently called and corroborated Black Jack's testimony, but added nothing to it. Several other witnesses testified to matters of little moment, then Antone the herder was called. He stated that he had seen Smith Landers near the scene of the killing; that he was on foot and carried a gun. He was walking very rapidly—almost running, in fact—in the direction of the Reed homestead, and away from the scene of the tragedy, not toward it. This was before the killing, Hedges being at the time engaged in helping get the sheep across the bridge. Hedges had started toward home a few minutes later, by way of the upper trail. He had not seen him again, nor had he seen any one else in that vicinity. He had heard shots a little later, perhaps a dozen. He had thought about Hedges, but considered him amply able to take care of himself, and so thought no more about it at the time.

Antone was excused and, the testimony being now all in, the jury turned its attention to the material evidence. A brief examination was sufficient to establish the fact that the bullets were all alike and that they were in no way related to the shell and could not possibly have been used in the same gun.

The jury now retired to another room; the crowd passed out to stand about in little groups and discuss the evidence. The sheriff sat on the front seat of the official hack, with the prisoner on the seat beside him; the deputy, gun in hand, occupied the back seat. Everybody was waiting for the verdict, and in surprizingly short while the coroner made his appearance and read it aloud from the veranda. It was the usual noncommital affair, and beyond recommending that the prisoner be held in charge, there was nothing definite about it. As soon as it had been read the crowd dispersed, and the sheriff began his all-night drive to the county seat at Tollman City.

None of Smith Landers' folks were present, and aside from a hand wave on the part of a friend or two, there was none to bid him good-by or wish him good luck. Gene stood at the gate and watched the boy, as the sheriff drove away. He smiled and whistled a bar from "The Cat Came Back," then made his way to the bunk-house.

The ranch boys were there ahead of him, engaged in a lively discussion of the evidence and the verdict. Gene sat down and lighted

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his pipe; the discussion became animated; Black Jack presently stepped in.

"Chore-time, boys," he said shortly; "get busy, there'll be plenty of time to chew the rag after supper."

The boys promptly crowded through the door, and Black Jack smiled as he watched them dash away toward the corral and barns.

"What you theenk on thees evidence?" Gene asked after a while.

"Fine and dandy," replied Black Jack as he dropped into a chair. "The kid played right into our hands when he made that break to get away. He's guilty as ——, and that little break is going to go hard with him when he comes to trial. He's scared stiff, too, and I'll bet twenty dollars he spills the whole story inside of twenty-four hours."

"Maybe so," Gene admitted, "but something she ees look ver' fonny. Thees Antone she ees say thees boy walk away from where thees Hedgehog she ees killed. Thees happen jus' few minutes before she ees killed. Thees boy she ees een one —— beeg hurry, too. Me? I lak for know what for she ees ron away from thees place before thees man ees killed."

"I've been thinking about that myself," returned Black Jack. "I don't quite get it all; but he had a hawse somewhere around, I reckon, and my guess is that he was hunting pheasants along the creek above the bridge, and had his hawse tied to Reed's fence, some place. Well, he probably followed the creek down to the bridge and went on down a little farther. Later on he was going back after his hawse and accidentally run on to the sheep. He saw Dave and thought he might get a crack at him, and then he moved the hawse and tied him nearer home so he could make a quick getaway. Looks easy enough that way, don't it?"

"Maybe she ees lak you say," Gene conceded, "but she got ver' leetle tam for move thees hawse and come back again. And eef she ees theenk on kill somebody, what for she ees show hees-self lak that?"

"He probably never saw Antone at all," replied Black Jack. "Antone crossed ahead of the sheep to turn 'em, and Dave was drivin' them. Landers saw Dave and thought Antone was somewhere near, but out of sight. He had his eyes on Dave. Dave was the game he was after. That's the way I've got it sized up."

"No, no!" Gene exclaimed. "I no see eet that way. Thees boy she ees live een thees timber; she ees hunt t'ousan' tam een thees woods. She got ver' sharp eye, too. She ees see one cheepmunk half a mile away—thees keed. She ees see thees Hedgehog, and she ees see Antone, too. She ees no theenk on kill somebody when she ees mak track so fast, een plain sight. Maybe she ees theenk on that, later, but jus' now she ees theenk on sometheeng else. She look fonny!"

Black Jack pondered this, but said nothing, and Gene presently went on:

"I lak for see these leetle widow womans, me. She ees ron een my mind whole lot. What you say I tak leetle treep tomorrow and breeng thees lady to thees funeral?"

Black Jack regarded Gene, in dazed astonishment.

"What in ——?" he managed finally to get out. "Your brains must be goin' south! Why, man, you never saw her in your life! You don't reckon she'd go ridin' with a man she never saw before? And to a funeral, at that! Your mind's a-wanderin', man!"

"I feex that, all right," replied Gene. "Mees' Hedges she ees maybe feex up one leetle invite for thees lady. Pretty soon I go see about that. I theenk thees lady will come. But maybe she don' come. How about that? I see thees lady, anyhow. I get leetle look aroun' thees place, too. Maybe I see sometheeng, maybe I hear sometheeng. Maybe not. No matter—jus' leetle tam lost—that's all."

Black Jack never wholly trusted any one, there was always at least some slight reservation; Gene's proposal amazed him and he eyed the man with growing distrust. Gene was quick to sense Black Jack's suspicion, but he said nothing, and his eyes were veiled as he waited for the other to decide. Black Jack pondered for some time.

"All right," he said at last, "it's a fool idea, but it might lead to something, at that. You'd better see the missis, and if she ain't wantin' to use the hack in the mawnin' you can take the blacks and go to it. And may the Lord protect you!"

Gene sprang to his feet and picked up his hat, then turned to face his scowling friend.

"I forgeet sometheeng," he said. "How for eet ees to thees Reed place by wagon road? And how you go?"

"It's about twelve miles," replied Black

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Jack. "You drive to the Allen ranch, then turn up Plum Creek till you come to the Packjack mine road. Then turn to the right. It's a long way around, but you can't miss it."

"Ver' good," returned Gene. "And now I go for see Mees' Hedges."

The two women were setting the table for supper, when Gene presently stepped into the kitchen and made known his errand. The women stared, evidently taken completely by surprize. Gene repeated his request; Mrs. Hedges pondered a moment, then found a scrap of paper and scribbled the "leetle invite" with a pencil held stiffly in a toil-knotted hand. She smiled pleasantly as she handed the note to Gene, who sensed a remarkable change in her. The hunted look was gone from her eyes, she seemed years younger, there was a subtle change even in the tones of her voice.

"I hope you can persuade Mrs. Reed to come," she said, still smiling. "It will not be a very pleasant occasion, but she must get awfully lonesome, and I have never seen her. I hope she comes."

"I do my best," said Gene as he passed out.

Gene's singular project made a deep impression upon Black Jack, and the more he thought about the matter the harder it seemed to understand. He watched Gene, surreptitiously during the evening, and again on the following morning.

Gene whistled gayly while he hitched the blacks to the hack, and there was something in his manner, or in the air, that thoroughly aroused Black Jack's suspicion. He watched Gene drive through the big gate and up the road, and when the rig disappeared behind a grove of trees he saddled his horse and set out for the Reed place by way of the upper trail. This was a short cut; he had to travel little more than half the distance Gene would have to go, so he rode leisurely and stopped at the scene of the killing to examine the ground again. He had plenty of time, and so made a most careful search, both above and below the trail. He found Gene's tracks above the big boulder, followed his trail to the bed of shale and back again, and at last found and picked up an empty automatic pistol shell.

And now the whole thing was a greater puzzle than ever. There were no tracks except Gene's—he was certain about that—yet here was the shell. The trail had been cut in the steep side-hill, there was a six-foot bank, the pistol ejector could not possibly have thrown the shell to this point if the shooter had been standing in the trail. The shell looked fresh, he sniffed at it, the smell of newly burned powder was rank upon it.

Black Jack was now completely mystified and muddled. He eyed the little shell stupidly for a time, then sat down on a convenient rock and filled his pipe. He smoked thoughtfully, eying the shell the while and turning it over in his hand. Beyond question it had contained one of the bullets that had brought death to Dave Hedges; but how could it have reached the point at which he had found it? Had Gene had a hand in the killing? The idea seemed preposterous.

He pondered this point and was able to check Gene's movements on the day in question, to the extent that it was clearly impossible that he could have had a hand in the actual killing. But Gene must have dropped that shell. That much was certain, for there was no other way for it to get to the spot where he had found it; and if that were the case, Gene must have dropped it yesterday. But how had he come into possession of it? There was no answer to that.

Thus Black Jack pondered for the better part of an hour, but in the end he was no nearer to a solution than he had been in the beginning. Gene had not been actually present at the killing, he was sure about that, but he was now firmly convinced that he had been mixed up in the matter, in some way, and it remained for Black Jack to discover that way.

With this idea riding him hard he slipped down the bank to the trail, mounted his horse and proceeded upon his way to the Reed place. Arriving in the vicinity of the road-house he dismounted and concealed his horse in a clump of bushes, then selected a place from which he could watch the house without danger of being discovered.

Gene presently drove up and tied the team to the hitch-rail in front, then walked around the house to knock at the kitchen door. He heard some one moving about inside, then the door swung open and he found himself face-to-face with an amazingly pretty little blond lady who appeared to be about twenty-five years of age. She appeared a bit startled at first, but Gene's

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irresistible smile reassured her and she smiled back.

"Won't you come in?" she invited pleasantly, stepping back and swinging the door wide.

Gene went inside, the woman brought a chair, and Gene sat down. He refused to surrender his hat, and sat fumbling it while the widow placed a chair for herself; and he now observed that her left hand was heavily bandaged. The widow observed his glance and hastily concealed the injured hand beneath her apron, as she sat down. Gene stifled the question he was about to ask. The action seemed peculiar, the widow was plainly a little disconcerted, Gene became embarrassed and there was a moment of distressed silence.

Gene now bethought himself of Mrs. Hedges' note and was rummaging his pockets in search of it, when a girl child of four came skipping into the room. She promptly climbed into her mother's lap; she supplied a topic for conversation, the tension was relieved and Gene abandoned his search. The child was a bit shy, at first, but soon smiled her approval of Gene; constraint was banished, and they chatted away like old friends.

The widow talked about the child and the ranch—spoke freely of her dead husband. Gene had little to say. He was content to admire the little widow, and to watch the play of emotion upon her delicate, sensitively mobile face. He forgot what he had come for, and might have sat entranced until night had not the widow suddenly changed the subject.

"But I am keeping you, perhaps," she unexpectedly interrupted herself to say. "I do run on so when I get started. You haven't told me who you are, or what you came for."

"I am Gene Laplante," replied Gene, "and I am come from thees Hedges ranch for tak you to thees funeral, maybe."

The woman sprang from her chair and clutched the child to her bosom.

"Who are you?" she demanded sharply. "And what do you want?"

Gene rose from his chair.

"I am just telling you," he said. "I am Gene Laplante, and I come to tak you to thees funeral, eef you lak for go. I have for you one leetle note from Mees' Hedges, eef you lak for read."

Gene produced the note, the widow put the child down and, with some hesitation, took the crumpled paper. She read the note, glanced quickly at Gene, then read it again. Plainly she was puzzled and undecided, but she seemed fully to have recovered her composure. She mused for a time, holding the note to her lips. Gene stood fumbling his hat and smiling down at the child.

"Very well," said the widow finally, "I think there really is no reason why I shouldn't go. Please be seated. I will be ready in a few minutes."

The widow disappeared with the child, through an adjoining door. Gene sat down. He suspected that the widow's "few minutes" meant at least a half-hour, so he settled himself for a long wait.

"Thees one ver'nice place for stay," he muttered. "I no care eef she never get ready."

The widow was ready in a surprizingly short while, however, and Gene promptly led the way out to the hack. The ride was a treat for the child and she prattled continually, but the widow was thoughtful and preoccupied. Gene respected her mood and drove some miles in silence, glancing from time to time at the child. At last he could hold his peace no longer.

"What name you call thees leetle one?" he asked, smiling at the child.

"Her name is Daisy," replied the widow shortly.

"How old she ees?" Gene persisted.

"She will be five in January," replied the widow still shortly, without looking up.

Gene felt a long way off, and so held his peace for some time. The child presently began to nod, and finally fell asleep in her mother's arms.

"You drive team, sometam?" Gene ventured after a time.

"Oh, yes; I've driven a great deal. I've had to do it quite often."

Gene glanced wistfully at the sleeping child, then, very timidly:

"I lak ver' much for hold thees baby for leetle while, eef you don't mind? But, your hand—perhaps——"

The widow looked up, surprized, then glanced at the bandaged hand. She hesitated, smiled a little, then passed the child to Gene and took the lines. The sun beat down upon them when they presently passed out of the timber; Gene took off his

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hat to shield the child's face; the widow smiled again.

"You'll spoil your complexion," she said.

"No matter," returned Gene. "I lose thees one, for feefty cents I get better one—some drug-store!"

The little widow laughed heartily, treated Gene to a lovely glance and began to chatter as she had done at home earlier in the day. Gene was content to hold the pretty child and listen to the widow's swift flow of talk, until they neared the ranch. He began to betray uneasiness, then, and presently interrupted.

"I am theenk you better tak thees baby, now," he said. "I no lak for kill somebody, and Black Jack and thees ranch hands—they one gran' bunch scoundril! They see Gene hol' thees baby, they all drop dead for laugh!"

Gene passed the baby over to the woman and took the lines, then drove up in front of the mansion and stepped down from the rig. Emery Slade came to take charge of the team, and in spite of heroic efforts to suppress it his face wore a wide grin as Gene took the baby again and helped the widow down from the hack.

A considerable crowd had already assembled, and Gene's face flamed as he carried the child and piloted the widow into the presence of Mrs. Hedges. His usual self-possession was near the breaking point, but he managed the introduction and turned the baby over to the widow, then hastily retreated and made his way to the bunk-house.

Black Jack sat alone, quietly smoking near an open window, when Gene stepped in. Black Jack had made a hasty search of the Reed premises, immediately following the departure of Gene and the widow, but was able to discover nothing whatever to justify his suspicions. His distrust was in no degree allayed, however, and as he rode home the conviction grew upon him that soon or late he would surely unmask a conspiracy of some sort between Gene and the Reed woman. He did not understand; the empty automatic shell, Gene's tracks and the positive knowledge he held respecting Smith Landers, formed a puzzle that he could not at present solve, but he had faith that in time he'd find the connecting link. In the mean time he'd keep a sharp eye on Gene's movements, at all times.

Gene stopped abruptly just inside the door and he stared when he noted that Black Jack's boots were covered with red dust. The soil in the valley was black, whereas, in the vicinity of the Reed place it was red. Black Jack observed Gene's glance; he looked down at the boots and the shadow of a smile played upon his face as he raised his eyes to meet Gene's. The men eyed each other, and there was a hint of dynamite in the air.

"I see you brought the widow," said Black Jack easily. "Have any trouble workin' her into the notion of coming?"

"Not," replied Gene as he dropped into a chair and felt for his pipe. "She ees ver' happy for get chance for leetle ride."

"Find out anything?" Black Jack inquired shortly.

"Not," replied Gene, with a prolonged glance at Black Jack's boots. "How about Black Jack? What she ees fin' out—thees tam?"

The direct way was Black Jack's way, subtleties were wholly out of his line. He knew that Gene knew well-enough where he had been, so he obeyed a sudden impulse and drew the little automatic shell from his pocket.

"Ever see that, before?" he demanded, holding the shell out to Gene.

Gene took the shell and examined it for a moment, then passed it back. "I theenk not," he said evenly. "Where you fin' heem?"

The ranch bell rang, summoning every one to the ceremony; the men rose to their feet; Black Jack's eyes bored straight into Gene's.

"I found it near the spot where Dave was killed," said Black Jack, replying to Gene's question. "It was layin' above the trail, your tracks were all around it. There was no other tracks but yours. How do you reckon it got there?"

"She beats me," replied Gene quietly. "I no see heem. Maybe I no look ver' close. But listen. Gene ees lak for play hees game on what you call 'square.' I fin' out sometheeng—maybe. She ees no sure, yet—onderstan'? Gene ees no lak for mak talk till he ees sure. Jus' wait, by and by she ees all come out straight. I say no more."

Gene's manner was convincing, and Black Jack's convictions were badly shaken. He studied the matter, with his glance on the

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floor. After all, he hadn't much to base his suspicions upon; and in Gene's presence, with Gene's last words still ringing in his ears, his distrust seemed unworthy.

"Well," he said finally, "maybe I did get you wrong, Gene, and if I've been mistaken I want to get straight. I've had my suspicions—I don't deny that—but I reckon I'd better ditch 'em, right here!"

And Black Jack put out his hand.

"No," returned Gene, putting his hands behind his back, "a handshake she ees mean whole lot to mans lak you and me, Black Jack, and maybe we feel sorry about it sometam. Don' be mad, please—when she ees all straight—then we shake, and mean it. What you theenk 'bout that?"

"I reckon you're right," replied Black Jack very softly. "And I say true when I say that I hope the time will come soon when we can shake hands and both mean it."

"And I am hope so, too," said Gene earnestly. "And now we better go queek to the beeg house—the bell she ees reeng long tam back. Jus' geev leetle tam," he added, as they turned to the door, "she ees all come out straight. No fear 'bout that."

The men now made their way to the mansion and joined the throng gathered about the big front veranda, where the ceremony was to be held.

The rites were very brief, and Dave Hedges' body was soon laid to rest in the community cemetery near the Store.

It was nearing sundown when the returning Hedges party arrived at the ranch, but the little widow declined an invitation to spend the night there, and Gene took her home in the hack. He had missed his supper at the ranch, so he stopped for a little lunch and a chat with the widow; and his heart was light when he drove back to the ranch, for the woman had given him her hand at parting and had asked him to come again.

CHAPTER V

BUNK-HOUSE CHAT, AND THE PACKJACK MINE

"THEES leetle Red-Bug hawse" was the personal property of Gene Laplante. Gene was rather fond of the animal because of the fact that he had promptly "piled" such of the boys as had so far tried to ride him, and Gene got a lot of fun out of it. Ed Martin, who had been the last to try the Red-Bug, had really been pretty seriously hurt and was still limping, two weeks after the Hedges funeral. This sensation had waned to a mere echo, the store had temporarily lost its attractions and the boys were content for a time to spend their evenings playing cards and reading magazines, or swapping persiflage in the bunk-house.

Ed Martin was the official fun-maker, with Gene coming in strong on the chorus, so to speak. Ed had just returned from the store with the Tollman City *Gazette*, and was juggling it into proper shape for reading aloud to the boys—a nightly performance. The chatter ceased, Ed dropped into a chair and read the principal news items, then ran his eye over the advertising.

"Ha!" he presently exclaimed. "Dance at the Packjack mine! That new watchman at the Packjack has sure got his nerve puttin' a dance ad in a newspaper! Listen, fellers:

" 'Grand dance at the Packjack Mine. Mr. James Pressley, proprietor.' "

"*Mister* Pressley! Wouldn't that jar you, r w! Pressley? Sounds like some new kind of hog-feed. Listen. Friday night, September fourth, eight P. M. Tickets two dollars a head, includin' supper. Ladies free. Four smoked hams, boiled. Two fresh hams, boiled. Pickles, strawberry shortcake, apple-pie, plum-pie, mince-pie, huckleberry-pie—yum! Yum! Pickles——"

"You said pickles once before," Emery Slade interrupted. "How many times you go'n'ta mention them pickles, anyhow? Nobody eats pickles at a dance, you know, so what's the use ridin' 'em that-a-way?"

"Depends on how much red licker he's lapped up," declared Ed. "Who's readin' this ad, anyhow? Close your trap and open your ears, child—your mind ain't adapted for handin' out information, a-tall.

"Listen. Where was I at? Oh, yes. 'Pickles.' All right; 'pickles, hams—six of 'em—boiled. Huckleberry-pie, raisin-pie, blueberry-pie. Twenty cakes! Count 'em: Coconut-cake, layer-cake, jell-cake, pound-cake— Say. Any of you fellers know why——"

"Wait a moment!" This from Willie Hoyt. Willie wore glasses and took himself rather seriously. "I don't imagine you are reading any of that out of the paper; you are just making it up as you go along, I imagine."

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"You imagine!" exclaimed Ed. "What have you got to imagine with? Twice all in one sentence, too!"

There was some laughing, and Willie subsided.

"He impugned my veracity!" Ed went on to complain. "And me with the reputation I got! Let's see. Where was I at? Ha! 'Pound-cake.' Who knows why it's called 'pound-cake?' "

"I imagine it is because it takes a pound of ingredients to produce it." This was Willie Hoyt again.

"Ingredients! Whish! Fan me, fellers!" exclaimed Ed, slumping limply in his chair. "Any flour, or eggs? Have to mix anything else with them ingredients? Imagining again, too! Gene, you're bustin'. Out with it!"

"Me?" drawled Gene. "I am imagine she ees call 'pound-cake' for why you got to poun' heem all up weeth ax—before you can eat heem."

When the ensuing uproar had somewhat subsided Ed rapped the table heavily with his knuckles.

"Order in the court!" he roared. "Why all this unseemly mirth? Listen. I admits there ain't any ad in the paper, but there is a notice stuck up in the post-office. Old 'Peg-leg' Jim Faler is losin' his job as watchman at the Packjack mine. There's a new man goin' on in his place, and he's givin' a big dance. Wants to get acquainted, he says. I talked with him quite a spell, down at the office. Name's Pressley. James Pressley. He don't belong in our set, a-tall. City chap. Pale as a town gal. Not the kind that's around lookin' for watchin' jobs, way back in the hills. Brains, you know. Keen eye. Talks sharp and all that. Says old Peg-Leg is stoppin' for awhile to show him around. And now I'm goin' to do a little prophetizin' stunt. That guy ain't here for no watchin' job, and I'm offerin' to lay a small bet that the old Packjack will soon be hummin' again.

"But there's go'n'ta be a dance, all right. And four-five hams, and stacks of pies, and a whole passel of cakes. And old Dad Schultz—which there ain't any better fiddler in the world—is goin' to rassle with the ragtime. Banjoing by Roy Bell, piano ticklin' by Peach Martin. How many's goin'?"

All except Gene were going, it seemed. Gene was noncommittal.

"Maybe so, maybe not. She all depends," he answered when Ed put the direct question.

"All depends on the little widow, I reckon," Ed grinned.

"You aimin' to ride thees leetle Red-bug hawse to thees dance?" Gene came back.

"Aw ——!" Ed complained when the haw-hawing had died away. "Ain't you fellers ever goin' to let up on that? Can't a feller get piled once in a while without everybody throwin' fits about it for the next ten or fifteen years? I'm all busted up, I tell you. But as soon as this here hip quits creakin' like a rusty hinge, I gentle that cocky little kiuse till you fellers can set him. You hear me?"

There was more or less edge to this, and the others were well-enough pleased to let the subject drop and turn to a discussion of the prospective "eats," and means of transportation. The big clock presently struck ten, and Black Jack, who had been silently brooding all evening with his chair tipped against the wall, let the chair down with a bang and got to his feet.

"Ten o'clock, boys," he said sharply, "time to hit the hay."

Five minutes later the lights were out.

THE little log-cabin mining-town called Packjack, perched upon a shelf of Simmons Mountains, some ten miles nearly due east of Stevenson's store, had for thirty years been a famous place in the Two Color country. It had begun business as a placer-camp, and was for many years called "Hokum." The placers played out after a time, and the camp languished until old "Kanaka" Joe discovered the Packjack quartz lode. All in due time Joe was swindled out of the mine, of course, and the new owners incorporated under the name of "The Packjack Mining Company." Much stock was sold by these would-be swindlers, under the impression that the ore deposit was a mere pocket, but contrary to all expectations the mine quickly developed into a bonanza. It had produced millions and was still producing heavily, when it was suddenly closed down without warning and apparently without reason. Many rumors floated about, but the real reason for the closing of the mine was locked in the brains of two men, and both were old heads in the little matter of keeping a secret.

The mine remained closed from month to

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month, minority stockholders at last became suspicious and a delegation finally came out from New York to investigate. These men were in deadly earnest and a most thorough investigation was made. There was plenty of good ore in the stopes, the mill-bins were full, the machinery had been kept in first-class condition, a word would start everything going again. But who was to say the word? There was no answer to that question.

They knew that the controlling interest had passed to a stranger, just prior to the shut-down, and they knew that the stock stood on the company's books in the name of "O. H. Stevenson." But Stevenson was a mystery, and all efforts to locate him failed miserably. A diminutive lawyer armed with Stevenson's proxies had appeared for Stevenson at the last stockholders' meeting, but Stevenson himself seemed almost to be a myth.

The little country merchant who ran the store and the post-office in connection known officially as Two Color, signed his name "H. Stevenson," and because of the similarity of names and his proximity to the mine he came in for a share of the delegation's attention. But they soon learned that Stevenson always had been and still was heavily mortgaged to the Hedges estate, so any thought of him being the owner of over half a million of Packjack stock was preposterous on the face of it.

But two theories remained to account for the shut-down. It might be the old-fashioned freeze-out game, aimed at the minority stockholders; or it might be an attempt to starve Dan Reed out and acquire his power-site for a mere song. The first was improbable, because this stock was most of it held by men not easily beaten; the second seemed little short of foolish, because the loss at the mine would quickly mount to a figure far greater than the fifty thousand dollars that Reed was asking for his site. Altogether, it was a most puzzling situation, a condition which no hypothesis seemed to fit, so the delegation at last gave it up and returned to New York.

A little later Dan Reed was killed, and the general opinion was that he had been murdered. Still later Hedges himself had been killed in a strange manner; and because of the fact that Hedges had visited the mine a number of times just before the shut-down, there were many who believed that the killing of both Hedges and Reed was in some strange way connected with the Packjack tangle, and had something more behind it than a squabble over an insignificant sheep-bridge.

To the stockmen and their families the Packjack mine always had been a fascinating romance. Mining operations were more or less of a mystery to them, scores of fortunes had been made there, many men had been killed in the boom days, so the mine really was the one central, dominating fact of the country. The prolonged shut-down was therefore bitterly resented and looked upon as a deliberate affront to the community. Thus the knowledge that a new and apparently wholly unnecessary watchman had taken charge, aroused intense interest. Then Mr. H. Stevenson visited the mine, and this led to the little storekeeper's name being again connected with the Packjack muddle, and it was commonly supposed that the mine would soon resume operations.

Mr. H. Stevenson was a colorless, thin-faced, smooth-shaven, apologetic little man of sixty; a man with veiled eyes, a man who seemed to have at least a little knowledge upon every subject under the sun, a man who spoke only when spoken to, a man who seemed to be a stranger to every human emotion. He was a notary public, something of a lawyer, and the business confidant of many people. He was an expert bookkeeper, and the big safe in the office at the rear end of the store contained numerous private papers belonging to people from far and near in the Two Color country, including a sizable sheet-iron box stuffed with the deeds and mortgages of the Hedges estate. He had been intimate with Dave Hedges, from the first, and Hedges was known to have financed the store. People said that he was a man of brains, he was known to be well-educated, and it was a mystery why he had buried his talents in this out-of-the-way place.

There was an air of mystery about the man and he was popularly supposed to be the custodian of more secrets—business and the other kind—than any other hundred men in the valley; and it was even whispered about that if old man Stevenson ever took a notion to talk, his disclosures would turn the country wrong side out. Altogether, the soft-spoken little storekeeper was now actually more talked about than even Black

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Jack himself, whose name was often used to frighten children and was a by-word for a hundred miles around.

AT THE Hedges ranch, interest in the dance was intense and all save Black Jack and Gene attended. It rained all night and it was nearly noon when the boys came slopping through the mud to the bunk-house. Black Jack, who had more ways than one of handling his boys, gave them a half-holiday, and they slept the afternoon away till nearly supper-time. The chores attended to and supper over they lolled about the bunk-house, smoking and discussing the dance; an occasional groan, coming from one of the bunks, reminded them that Emery Slade was still alive. Emery had met with an accident at the dance, and while his condition was not now considered serious, it was plainly evident that the boy felt pretty sorry for himself. Gene gave the sick man a drink of water, then rejoined the others to interrupt the dialog and demand of Ed a straight-talk account of Slade's mishap.

"Well," returned Ed, "there ain't really much to it, but what there is— Well, it's maybe pretty good, so I'll give it to you without trimmin's. It don't need any trimmin's! But first I want to give you a little account about how our esteemed friend Andy Phelps flopped around up there at the dance. It was like this: I didn't have any chance to get a vial of my own, so I had to depend on my friends, of course. I was floor manager and had to do the callin', so I worked off a quadrille and got a waltz started, then I slipped out and hunted Andy up. He had a bottle, all right, and I took a little snifter. 'Lickum good article,' say I. 'Ought to be a powerful help to that bum hip of mine. About four like that and I believe I could shake a pretty nasty limb, myself. And say, 'bo,' says I, 'I'll put you wise to something! The pantry window ain't fastened a-tall! Me and Peach Martin' was in there, sizin' up the eats, and I made sure of it. You could dang near reach them cakes without crawlin' clear in. Wish I had time—you know me, Andy,' says I, 'if I had time I'd do it, myself. But I've got to get back inside and earn my money. Good luck! Meet you back of that toolshed in half an hour. Do your duty, bo!'

"'All right, Ed,' says he, 'I'll look her over.' Then I beat it back into the house. I rattled off another quadrille and got a two-step to goin' good, then I hot-footed it out to look for Andy. I found him in a clump of bushes back of the shed. It was pretty dark, and I wasn't sure.

"'That you, Andy?' says I.

"'Sure,' replies a mumblin' voice that nobody would know was Andy.

"'You make it all right?' says I.

"'Sure, I made it,' says the voice, mumblin' worse than before."

"'Hey, you!' says I. 'Ease up a mite. You're liable to founder yourself that-away!' Then I dropped to my knees and pried off a chunk of cake. I took a big bite and dang near busted a tooth.

"'Say!' says I. 'What's the matter with this cake, anyhow?'

"'Had a accident,' says he.

"'You'll have another one, in about a minute, if I get another gravel in my teeth!' says I. 'Where's that vial? Got to have something to soften this gravel up 'fore it gets to my gizzard. Gi'me that bottle!'

"Andy dug up the bottle and I took a little shot. 'There! That's better,' says I. 'You're a —— of a man to send for provisions, you are! How did it happen?'

"'Tell you how it was,' says Andy. 'I got in, all right—no trouble a-tall. Then I lost a lot of time lookin' around for that jell-cake you was a-spielin' about down in the bunk-house t'other night. I looked all around for that jell-cake, then I spotted a bottle. I took a little snifter and looked around some more, then some one grabbed the door knob! Of course I had to grab the first thing I could lay hands on, which happened to be this here cake. I'd left the winder open, and it's a good thing I did, or it would have been all off. Some one opened the door and I dived through that winder like a bullfrog. And I'd have been all right if that winder hadn't come down right then; and the cake went smash on the ground. The winder had me pinned fast and I had to whirl over on my back to keep from breakin' my legs—and I come down plumb on top of that cake! Man, I was sure fast! Wouldn't have got out a-tall, only some gal—think it was Blossom Hedges—raised the winder and let me out. She poked her head out of the winder and laughed like a lunatic, she did, and I beat it. But the cake was ruined. That's about all.'

"'Cake's all right, yet,' says I. 'Mussed up a mite, but the flavor ain't hurt none to

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mention. G'me that vial; another gravel pesterin' me,' says I. I took another little drink, then I shook the bottle.

" 'She's gettin' pretty light,' says I.

" 'Two more bottles in a badger-hole out yonder,' says he.

" 'Good,' says I. 'And now let's go in and throw our feet. My game hip is a-beggin' for action. Come on—and mind you don't get loaded so you forget where that badger-hole is.' Then we beat it for the house, and that's about all of that.

"Well, we sure had a good time! Lots of folks, elegant music and all that. And eats! Man, you ought to been there! So we hammered away pretty near all night, and along about four I called the Home Sweet Home, and the dance busted up. I struck out for the barn, and found Andy waitin' with a lantern, and right here's where Emery makes his debo.

" 'Emery Slade is layed out down in the barn, plumb dead-to-the-world,' says Andy. "We've got to get him to the ranch somehow. He'll die if we leave him here!'

" 'Can't he ride a gentle hawse?' says I.

" 'Ride ——!' says he. 'He couldn't set up in a rockin'-chair! I tell you he's gone to the races,' says he.

" 'You're a little wabbly, yourself,' says I.

" 'Sure, I'm wabbly,' says he. 'But I didn't get wabbly enough to forget where that badger-hole was, at that. How come you didn't get dry, no more? Bottle in the house?'

" 'Nary bottle,' says I. 'I know when I've got enough, that's all.

" 'Huh!' says he. 'Gettin' pious all of a sudden are you?'

"I give him a little shove, and he dang near fell down, then we went to look for Emery. He was laid out in the hay, groanin' away like the end of the world.

" 'Wake up, you Piute, and have a drink,' says I, shakin' him up good and plenty.

" 'Le'me alone,' says he. 'I'm a-dyin'! Le'me alone! Let me die!'

" 'Come out of it!' says I, slappin' his face, good and plenty. Then we dragged him over and propped him up against a manger. We got a little licker into him, out of Andy's bottle, and that livened him up a little.

" 'How'd you get this way?' says I. 'Ain't you got no sense? You'll kill your fool self sometime—lappin' up licker that way!'

" 'Not licker,' says he plumb solemn. Andy was holdin' the lantern; you'd have laughed your head off if you could have seen Emery sattin' there denyin' the corn—when he couldn't hold his head up!"

" 'Not licker? Oh, Lord!' says I. 'You just got paralyzed on rainwater, I reckon. Or maybe it was soda-pop? Some people can't stand much, anyhow. Maybe you got drunk on pie!'

" 'No,' says Emery, 'I ain't a-claimin' it was pop or pie. I never said it. I said it wasn't licker. Le'me tell you how it was: I had my bottle hid in the stable, you know. Well, along about two o'clock I got tol'able dry and come down here for a little shot. It was dark as cats, I grabbed a bottle and turned her up, and took a big swoller of—hawse liniment! Got a-holt of the wrong bottle, see?'

" 'Hawse liniment? Great guns, man! That stuff will take the hair off'n a hawse's leg!' says I. 'No wonder you got laid out! Just where did you have that bottle hid?'

" 'In the medicine-chest,' says he.

" 'In the medicine-chest? Great Scott!' says I. 'Well, if that ain't a —— of a place to hide a bottle! Man, you're lucky to be alive! And, bein' as it was liniment that snowed you under, I'll he'p you out. But I'll tell you plain, if it had been whisky I wouldn't turn a hand.'

" 'You're a rotten liar!' says he. 'And you and me both knows it.'

" 'Feel fit to ride home in the hack?' says I.

" 'No, I don't!' says he. 'I don't feel fit for anything—only to die! I been layin' here for a week, burnin' up. My insides is a-fire, I tell you. I've got a ton of red-hot iron in me! And a barrel of red pepper! And a carload of carbolic acid! Honest, fellers, I couldn't get on to my feet to save my life.'

"Emery was maybe exaggeratin' a mite, but he was in pretty bad shape, at that. But I figured that a feller that could spill conversation that-a-way, wasn't half as bad off as he thought he was. So we got some coffee from the house, and doped him up, then we loaded him into the hack and and fetched him home. He groaned a heap, on the way home, but I reckon he'll be all right in a day or two. I reckon that's about all."

A hum of conversation followed; Ed

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rose and made his way to the sick man's bunk.

"How are you feelin', boy?" he asked. "Want some coffee—or something?"

"No," returned Emery, "I don't want nothin' but water. Don't bother about me, Ed—I'll be all right, in a year or two—just set a pitcher of water handy—or a wash-tub or something, so I won't have to bother you fellers in the night. Or maybe you'd better bed me down out by the river. I'll drink the old Two Color dry before mawnin'!"

Ed brought a pitcher of water and placed it on a chair beside the bed, then returned to his seat to spread out the daily paper and read to the boys.

CHAPTER VI

THE CASE AGAINST SMITH LANDERS

IN THE mean time Smith Landers, a hill boy who had spent his life hunting and fishing and exploring the mountains and big woods, who had seldom entered a house except to eat or sleep, had been eating his heart out in the county jail at Tollman City. The time-hardened old sheriff and the cold-eyed, hard-mouthed district attorney had resorted to strenuous methods to extract a confession, but contrary to all predictions the boy stood pat and refused from first to last to make any statement whatever, or to answer any question about anything. Three weeks had slipped by, the day set for the trial was close at hand, and still the boy was dumb.

Black Jack had repeatedly examined the ground in the vicinity of the killing, had extended the search for a mile or more in every direction, wholly without results. He had persistently questioned Antone, had interviewed the crazy prospector known as Vanderbilt, had scoured the country for days at a time on horseback in the hope that chance might throw something in his way, but nothing came of it all. He had learned that Slim Hatfield, whom he had suspected because of the fact that he had quarreled with Hedges and carried an automatic pistol, had returned to the Cow Creek Basin some two weeks prior to the time of Hedges death; but beyond that, and as far as his evidence against Landers was concerned, he stood exactly where he had stood at the time of the inquest.

The sheriff and the district attorney had made an investigation on the day following the Hedges funeral. The sheriff had brought Landers' bobnailed boots along, and guided by Black Jack the party visited the scene of the tragedy, where the fact was established beyond a doubt that these were the boots which had made the odd tracks.

With this matter settled positively, Black Jack had been optimistic, had felt certain that Landers would be convicted upon the evidence at hand. But as time passed and no new evidence turned up, doubt harrassed him and he began to look worried. The suspense irritated him, increased from day to day; and at last, on the day before the date set for the trial, he mounted his horse and set out for Tollman City for a conference with the district attorney.

It was well after dark when Black Jack arrived in Tollman City, but to his surprize there was a light in the attorney's office. He had ridden all day without food, but in his present frame of mind food was the least of his troubles; so he tied his horse to the rail in front and stepped without ceremony into the office.

Black Jack instantly sensed something amiss. The attorney greeted him too effusively, he was too polite as he placed a chair and offered a cigar, and his eyes were veiled.

"Anything new?" Black Jack presently inquired.

"Not a thing," replied the attorney, smoothly, "the boy is still standing pat. We haven't been able to get as much as a whisper out of him."

"You've got plenty of evidence to convict him, just as it stands, I reckon."

The attorney toyed with a pencil, his glance on the floor.

"I may as well be frank with you," he said, finally meeting Black Jack's glance squarely. "I know how you feel about it, Black Jack, but I've got to tell you that there isn't a chance. No jury will ever convict this boy on any such evidence. Never in the world! I hate to have to say it, but there's no use beating around the bush; unless you can dig up more evidence I shall be compelled to recommend the prisoner's discharge."

"——, man! You can't mean that!" Black Jack protested. "We put the boot to the tracks and it fit to a T, hobnails and

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all. You done it yourself. And the empty shell fits his gun—you tried it, yourself. We can prove by a dozen witnesses that he swore he'd kill Dave, sometime; and besides that, Antone will swear he saw Landers that day, close to the place and only a few minutes before the killing must have been done. What more do you want, man?"

"The evidence indicates Landers' guilt, I'll admit," returned the attorney. "But it don't prove it. Not by a long shot. I'll admit, too, that I think the boy had a hand in it, but there's one mighty lame place in your evidence: The bullets found in Hedges' body were all alike; beyond a reasonable doubt they were all fired from the same gun. But they don't fit Landers' gun, you see. Those bullets were fired from an entirely different kind of a gun, and there isn't a scrap of evidence to show that Landers owns such a gun, or ever had possession of one. There's been half a hundred reward hunters—including a dozen professional detectives—looking for evidence to connect the boy up with an automatic pistol; and the sum total of all they've found—is nothing. If the bullets fitted the boy's gun, you would have a cinch. As it is, you haven't got a case at all.

"And now I'll give you a tip. Just between me and you, we gave Landers a pretty strong dose of the third. He never cheeped. Never opened his mouth once. Now listen. The sheriff and I have talked it over, and we're agreed on this—that boy isn't the type that will stand the gaff on his own account. He'd cough it up in five minutes. He was protecting some one else—more than likely a woman—and that's the party who did the actual shooting—or knows who did do it. You have been overlooking something. I'm sure of it.

"I am going to turn the boy loose in the morning. Tomorrow morning. I won't try him now, because, if we try him now and fail, we're done. We can never try him again—for this crime. But, if we let him go now, and you can dig up more evidence later on, we may get him, yet. So get busy and show us what you can do."

Black Jack was stunned. The possibility of Smith Landers being set free without even a trial had never entered his mind. The attorney meant exactly what he said—nothing could be clearer than that—and arguing the matter would be utterly useless. There was nothing more to be said, it seemed, so he rose without a word and walked slowly toward the door.

"Just a word," said the attorney abruptly. "I want to tell you that I've got a sneaking admiration for that boy."

Black Jack turned to face the attorney, and stood with the door-knob in his hand. The man continued:

"He's got good stuff in him. A lot of it. The kind that heroes are made of. He isn't much to look at, but the world would be a lot better off if there were more like him in it. Don't mistake me; I'm the prosecuting attorney and I'll ride the case to a finish—if you can get the evidence. But I admire that boy. I'm counted a pretty cold-blooded proposition, and I reckon I am—just that. But tomorrow morning, when I turn that boy loose, I'm going to take him by the hand and wish him luck."

Black Jack was now thoroughly disgusted, as well as a bit muddled, so he abruptly swung the door open and left the room without a word. He stabled his horse and took supper at a convenient chophouse, then sought a hotel and went to bed.

AT DAYLIGHT on the following morning Black Jack started for the Two Color, determined to dismiss past and present troubles from his mind and plan for the future. But try as he would he could not dismiss these matters from his mind, and the attorney's hint about a woman kept slipping back as often as he drove it away. The attorney had plainly indicated the Reed woman—there was little doubt about that—but how could he connect her with the crime at this late date? The place might be searched again, but if there ever had been any evidence there it surely would not be there now.

"Maybe I did make a mistake," he muttered to himself. "That woman must have hated Dave like poison; the motive is there, but there ain't anything else. Not a scrap of evidence, and it's too late to look for any, now."

He mulled the matter over in his mind while he rode along, studied it from every angle for some time. At last he straightened up and, after a sharp glance around, said aloud and positively:

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"No, she never done it. No woman could shoot like that. Them automatics carry seven shots. There's five of them accounted for—four in Dave's body and one in the saddle. Five out of seven—straight to the mark—and the horse a-plungin'? No woman ever done it! And what become of Dave's gun and ca'tridge belt? That's another mystery if the woman done it. What woman would stick around to take a ca'tridge belt off'n a man she had just killed? It ain't in 'em! She'd hot-foot it away from there like the —— was after her! The woman might know who done it, maybe, but she never done it herself, and that's a cinch.

"And Landers' tracks was the only ones around there. That just about settles the whole business! He made the raise of an automatic pistol, somewhere, then he shot Dave and stole his gun and belt and buried the whole outfit—automatic and all—out in the woods, some place. Pretty slick, I'd call it—for a half-wit! But how about that empty shell I found above the trail, and Gene's tracks all around there!"

"Oh, ——! What's the use!" he added, then spurred the lazing horse into a lively canter and settled himself for a hard ride.

He was soon in deep thought again, however, and the horse, quick to sense it, settled to a walk.

Black Jack was deeply discouraged by this wholly unexpected turn of affairs. His prejudice insisted that Landers was guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and the idea of turning him loose without even a trial seemed monstrous. With his half-fanatical loyalty to Dave Hedges it seemed an appalling miscarriage of justice, and the more he thought about it the worse it seemed. So the man fumed and by degrees worked himself into a white heat of passion. He cursed the lawyer for a fool, then bitterly cursed him for a crook. He ran over in his mind a dozen plans for taking justice into his own hands, but gradually his rage burned itself out and he settled to a calmer consideration of the facts as they were, and to thoughts of the future.

It was clear that Smith Landers had slipped through his fingers, and all hope of earning the reward seemed lost. The reward was very much a secondary matter —the main thing was to avenge the murder —but this five thousand dollars had been an essential part of his projects for the future, and without it all his plans must come to wreck. And with the murderer running at large for him to meet frequently and think about every day, life would be intolerable, the game not worth the candle, and there seemed to be no way out except to pack up and leave the country. Yes, that's what he would do. He would pack up and leave as soon as he could, but first he would have to talk the whole thing over with Mrs. Hedges.

Having thus come at last to a definite conclusion, Black Jack set spurs to his horse and attended strictly to the business of getting back to the ranch. By hard riding he managed to arrive in time for supper, and when the meal was over and the boys all left the big kitchen he squared himself around to have it out with Mrs. Hedges.

"They've turned Smith Landers loose," he said abruptly.

"So I've heard," returned Mrs. Hedges shifting her chair to face Black Jack across the corner of the table. "The sheriff telephoned to the store, and Stevenson told Ed when he went for the mail. I'd been wondering why none of the witnesses had been subpenaed, so it didn't surprize me much."

"I never thought about that," replied Black Jack. "How come nothing was said durin' supper about Landers bein' free?"

"I don't know," replied the woman. "The boys probably thought I wouldn't care to hear about it."

"Like enough," Black Jack agreed. "And now I've got a little matter of business I want to talk over. I've been thinkin' of quitting, but I don't want to leave you in the lurch, so I'm sticking for a while if you want me."

The woman pondered for a moment.

"I hadn't thought about your quitting us," she said. "I don't see how we could get along without you, now."

"I aim to stick around awhile to see what turns up about this murder business," said Black Jack. "If nothing turns up I'll probably be leavin' in a month or so. I'm tellin' you so you can get used to the idea. I'm plumb beat, and if we can't get to the bottom of this business and catch the murderer and hang him higher than Gil'roy's kite, I'm leavin' the country, and that's all to it."

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"You are still set on hanging somebody?"

"Sure, I am. If Dave had been killed in a fair fight I wouldn't give a ——. I could snap my fingers and forget about it. But that wasn't the way of it. He was shot from behind a stump and didn't have a chance. I can't forget that."

"You still think Smith Landers killed Dave? How about the shots that Antone heard? Don't you think that those shots—so many of them—indicate that there might have been a third party present, and that it was a fair fight?"

"No, I don't," replied Black Jack, bluntly. "Landers' tracks was the only ones around there. Dave probably done some shootin', all right enough, but the other man was behind a stump. That's what makes me sore. If it had been a fair fight, I'd say let the best man win. But not the way it was. That's murder, and you can't make anything else out of it."

"Perhaps you're right," the woman conceded. "But somehow I simply can't think of Smith Landers doing cold-blooded murder."

"Sure, he done it," said Black Jack. "It's possible that he might have had some help; in fact there's been times when I was pretty sure that he did. But he was there and had a hand in it—there's no doubt about that. But, there's no use chewing it over; the thing is chawed to rags already."

Black Jack rose abruptly and started out.

"You'll stay for a while?" the woman inquired anxiously.

"Yes," replied Black Jack, "as long as you need me."

Mrs. Hedges smiled as Black Jack passed out, then turned to her daughter.

"He'll stay!" she smiled.

"Yes," replied the girl, "Black Jack will never quit us while we need him so badly. He isn't that kind."

"He's changing lately, since your father was killed, don't you think?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "I've noticed it. He's going to be a mighty good man to have around when his mind gets settled."

"There's a lot of good in Black Jack," the woman declared gravely. "He has led a wild life—a terrible life—and yet, somehow, I would rather trust Black Jack than any man I ever knew!"

Black Jack made his way to the bunkhouse, spoke shortly to Gene, who sat smoking and musing there alone, then threw himself on his bunk to rest. Perhaps an hour later the boys returned from the store and charged into the room like a band of horses. Gene regarded them with a tolerant smile as they settled here and there and rolled their cigarets. Gene was nearing thirty-six, but his heart was like a boy's, so he smiled.

"Smith Landers is back," Ed Martin remarked as he dropped into a chair and unfolded the daily paper. "Saw him down at the store, just now. He's lookin' pekid and pale, but man, he's the happiest kid that ever got out of jail! Old man Landers and Fred went after him and fetched him out in the hack. He ain't go'n'ta quit grinnin' for six months!"

"You grin leetle, too," said Gene, "eef you stop een thees —— rotten jail long tam like that. Not?"

"Reckon I would," Ed admitted. "And say—old Gran'ma Purviance has took to huntin' varmints in her old age. Uses her apron instead of a gun. Hen was tellin' us about it down at the store this evenin'. You know where they live—down in the tulie country three-four mile below the store? Henry's her son, you know, and two of Hen's big fat nieces live with 'em. Well, Hen has got a cave close to the river bank, and every time the river gets up a little there's a lot of water seeps into the cave. Hen put some chunks of cordwood down there and laid some planks on 'em so's the women could get out milk and cream and jam for Hen, without gettin' their little tootsies wet. Last night the cave door was left open, and this mawnin', little after daylight, gran'ma goes down there after jam, or something, for Hen's breakfast. There's a big yaller dog standin' on a plank over in the darkest corner, and gran'ma not bein' afraid of dogs just politely shoos him out with her apron. She follows him out, and when they get out to where it's daylight and she can see him good, it's a ten-foot mountain lion! Gran'ma yells, and Hen peeks out the window; then he runs for his gun.

"The old woman stands her ground, and the lion stands there spittin' at her and swingin' his tail and lettin' gran'ma have a good look at his teeth for quite a spell. Of course Hen has to hunt for his gun, then he has to go explorin' all around for

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his ca'tridges, and by the time he gets all ready, gran'ma has got the lion bluffed out and he's maybe a hundred yards away and coverin' ground like a scared coyote.

"Hen cuts loose three-four shots, and he knows he hit him, so he follows him on down in the brush. An hour or so later he comes back, packin' that lion's pelt, and the women goes down the trail maybe a hundred yards to meet him. Hen spreads the pelt out on the ground, and gran'ma stands there rollin' her hands in her apron and says 'My land! My land!' about forty times, and them two gals just naturally keels over in a faint. Faintin'est gals in the country, Liz and Jenny is.

"Well, Hen picks the gals up and throws one over each hip and packs 'em up to the house, and gran'ma trails along behind draggin' the lion skin. Hen 'lowed them two gals was powerful heavy and says he's goin' to try to arrange it so's they can do their faintin' closer to the house, after this."

"Thees old lady ees no ver' much skeer for thees lion, maybe," Gene suggested.

"Oh, no," returned Ed. "She's killed quite a passel of 'em herself, in her time. You can't scare these old dames that's lived here for forty years, believe me! They're case-hardened."

Ed squared around to the light and spread the evening paper, then glanced with a wide grin at Emery Slade, now fully recovered but still "a bit pale around the gills" as Ed put it. Ed cleared his throat noisily and suppressed the grin.

"Throat's pretty dry," he remarked solemnly. "Ought to have something to lubricate her up a little before I read to you fellers. Ain't got a little vial of hawse liniment on you, have you, Emery?"

"No," replied Emery, shortly, when the laughing had subsided. "No hawse liniment! Not on me, or in me, either. And take it from me; I ain't go'n'ta have. After this, when I takes a little snifter I'm aimin' to look her over keerful, first. Then I aims to smell her careful. Then I'll taste her—mighty light. Then if I'm satisfied there ain't never been any liniment in the bottle. or on the outside of it, or settin' in the same building, I'll tilt her up and let her gurgle into the works where she'll do some good. But no more turpentine and ackafortis for Emery Slade. I'll drink water first!"

"I see where you're right," returned Ed. "Glad to learn that you're gettin' wise in your old age. And now, boys, with your kind permission, I'll read this—more or less—newspaper."

Half an hour later Ed laid the paper aside and the usual bantering began, gradually growing more personal as the evening wore away.

"I hear that the upper trail along Rock Creek is gettin' in pretty good shape, lately," Ed presently remarked, with a knowing look at Gene. Ed usually got the worst of it when he tackled Gene, but he simply could not resist the temptation to rag Gene about the little widow. Gene smiled.

"She ees one ver' fine trail," he admitted. "Thees Dandy hawse she ees know thees trail, now, lak Ed Martin ees know the trail to where Blossom ees sit on sofa een the beeg house."

The boys grinned, with a guffaw or two; Ed had the grace to blush.

"Blossom is a mighty fine girl," returned Ed quickly. "Too good for the likes of me, Gene."

"Sure, she ees one fine gal," agreed Gene heartily. "Thees widow ees fine gal, too. I lak her ver' much."

Gene, with respect to his own affairs, was perhaps the frankest man in the world.

"I'll bet Gene marries the little widow 'fore we know it." Ed remarked, lightly.

"Sure, I marry her—eef she have me," Gene admitted. "I no theenk she have me, but eef she ees lak for marry Gene, she no have to wait long for heem to mak up hees mind."

Black Jack now rose from his bunk and took a seat near Gene, and the talk switched to his interview with the district attorney, then to Smith Landers, and at last to Slim Hatfield.

"Old man Peabody come down today, from his claim over on Haines Mountain," Ed presently remarked. "Saw him down at the store. He says that Slim Hatfield is gettin' the old Mort Ferman gang together again, and they're fixin' up that old corral over on the head of Cow Creek. I reckon that means more hawse rustlin' before long."

"Sure thing," agreed Black Jack. "I've been expectin' it ever since I heard that Hatfield was back from Nevada. Pretty slick game—runnin' Two-Color hawses over

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the mountains and turnin' 'em over to the High-Prairie gang, which markets 'em way off down in California, some place. Then the High-Prairie gang rustles a band in the Big Bend country and fetches 'em over here, and the Cow Creek outfit runs 'em clear off up into Montana. The law has never been able to handle them two outfits; we had to scatter 'em four-five times, and soon or late we'll have to do it again. And I'm a-sayin' that with Slim Hatfield runnin' things it's going to be one bloody job. A —— sight worse than it ever was when old Mort Ferman was headin' the outfit!"

" 'Worse' is right," agreed Ed. "And 'scatter 'em' is likewise and also right. They've always been the worst gang of cutthroats in the country, and the sooner they're put out of business, permanent, the better Ed Martin is goin' to sleep. I'd sure hate to have that outfit get into my bunch of beauties!"

CHAPTER VII

MR. H. STEVENSON SUDDENLY COMES TO LIFE

BLACK JACK lived in the hope that soon or late, now that Smith Landers was free, he would talk too much and divulge something that would furnish a real clue to the killing of Dave Hedges. But as time passed and it became common talk that Landers was "just as dumb out of jail as he was in it," he was gradually compelled to abandon this hope. He became more silent and moody as the weeks passed, and only the fact that there was much to do in preparing the big ranch for Winter, prevented him from packing his few belongings and leaving the country without ceremony.

At Black Jack's suggestion a cook-house was built and a cook employed for the men, thus relieving the Hedges women of the greater part of the household drudgery that had always been theirs during the lifetime of the master. New things were bought and such a part of the immense house as was necessary for the comfort of the women was completely furnished for the first time. A new bunk-house was built for the Mexican herders, and the blackened old tents along the river-bank were burned. Then the sheep came in from the hills, band after band, until nearly a hundred thousand of them were settled on the Winter bedding-grounds, scattered here and there for a dozen miles up and down the river. Thus in preparation for the Winter Black Jack kept busy twelve or fourteen hours a day, and the time seemed likely never to come when he could leave as he had planned.

Mr. H. Stevenson had delivered Dave Hedges' private papers to the probate court, but no will had been found. Legal formalities had delayed the settlement of the estate until late in November; then the administrator, a Tollman City ex-judge, was taken seriously ill, and the matter was still further delayed.

Gene continued to visit the little widow, two or three times a week, and Black Jack's suspicions often revived in spite of himself.

To Black Jack, spying upon a friend was ordinarily a disgusting, loathesome thing; but he felt justified in the present instance; felt that it simply had to be done; that no stone must be left unturned; so he followed Gene to the Reed place on three separate occasions. Nothing came of it, however, and at last he gave it up and practically abandoned the idea of connecting Gene and the little widow with the Hedges' matter.

Black Jack's normal condition was one of serene self-possession; small mishaps or even more serious reverses and disappointments ruffled him not at all; but these days found him nervous and irritable, and even so small a matter as the failure of the Packjack mine to reopen, came to be a source of annoyance and was looked upon as more or less of a personal affront. He had no positive information on the subject, but Hedges had occasionally dropped a word indicating that he knew more than he was telling about the Packjack tangle, and the matter worried him more or less.

Particularly he resented the continued inaction on the part of the Cow Creek gang. He had lived in daily expectation of a raid, and therefore kept close guard over the range stock; but half-subconsciously he had actually hoped for a raid and would have welcomed it. Lately he had craved action, longed for the old smell of burning powder, the hoarse shouts of savage combat, the sharp popping of rifles and six-guns and the thrilling whine of the flying

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lead. Thus the virile, primitive fighting man slowly came to life again, and if the Hatfield gang were looking for trouble they needed only to cross the trail of Black Jack Rogers.

Thus Black Jack fumed and worried his way through the weeks. Christmas came with its week of feasting and dancing and, at last, New Year's Eve. So far the Winter had been a remarkable one, and except on the higher peaks of the Saw Tooth Range there was no snow. A big house-party was on for tonight at the Hedges' mansion, with dancing and plenty of "eats," and it was planned to watch the Old Year out and the New Year in.

At seven the boys were all gathered in the bunk-house, dressing, chaffing, getting ready for the dance. Gene drove up with the little widow; the boys rushed out to shout a welcome and to put up the team, while Gene, with little Daisy in his arms, escorted the lady to the big house. Having stabled the team, the boys returned to the bunk-house, and a few minutes later Gene came in.

"Somebody she ees come lak —— on hawse," he said lightly. "She ees fair burn the road!"

"Somebody drunk already 'fore the dance even gets started?" Ed inquired with a wide grin.

The horse clattered up to the door and was jerked to a sudden stand; then, without knocking, the heretofore soft-spoken, apologetic little store-keeper, Mr. H. Stevenson burst into the room. Twenty years seemed magically to have dropped from him. No longer was his face without expression, no longer his speech soft and drawling, no longer his eyes lack-lustrous and veiled. Amazingly his voice was clear and sharp, as he spat out a short, "Good evening, men." His eyes blazed with suppressed excitement and gleamed with some fixed purpose as he stepped to the table, struck it sharply with his open hand and glanced swiftly around at the men.

"Men," he barked, "I'm here on business, and my time for telling it is short. I can't stop to explain everything—there is no time for that. You all know me; I've been in business here for nearly thirty years, and no man can say that I ever spoke falsely about my goods—or anything else. So I'm asking you to believe what I say, and get the explanation when there is more time. But enough of that.

"Listen. Believe me if you can. Smith Landers has just brought me word that Slim Hatfield and his gang have jumped the Packjack mine! They killed Pressley—slipped up and literally riddled him with bullets, without a word of warning. There's ten of them, they're in full possession of the mine and they're armed to the teeth. They intend to locate every one of those claims at midnight.

"Pay close attention, men. Some one has blundered—overlooked a bet—and the assessment work has not been done. There are sixteen claims, and not one of them has been patented. Every claim but one is open to location at midnight of this day—less than five hours away. They were open a year ago, but Hatfield doesn't know it, and that may be our salvation. Listen. Old Peg-leg's wages will hold one claim only, because he has been working for a measly ten dollars a month and his board, and it takes a hundred dollars to hold each claim. Pressley is—or has been—working for a private party and his pay will not go as assessment work. Hatfield knows this, of course. They're in possession, they're in deadly earnest, they're armed to the teeth—and this is the thing that Hatfield has had up his sleeve all the time.

"Now heed what I say, men. Don't ask me how I know. Mrs. Hedges and the girl are bankrupt—broke—flat—if that gang ever locates those claims and gets it on record! Mrs. Hedges don't own this ranch or anything on it. She owns the Packjack mine! By ——, men, I swear it!

"Listen. They don't know this themselves—these women—it was Dave Hedges' secret! And they must not know, yet. Not a word to the women about this until the proper time comes.

"Now, men, there's just one way to beat this gang, and only one. We've got simply to wipe them off the map! We've got just as much right there as they have, but they're in possession, and they'll shoot us down like dogs on sight! We've got to get possession of that mine and locate every one of those claims in our own names. Later on we can deed them to the women. There's no time to lose. That gang will scatter over those claims shortly after eleven to post their notices. And if ever they get those notices up, and even one of

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them gives us the slip and gets to the recorder's office, the mine is lost and the women are broke. It's a fight, men, for a million!

"Now men, this means a fight. Some of us will certainly be killed, but I ask no man to show the way. I'll lead! I hope you'll help me, but if you can not believe this wild tale and will not help; then, by ——, I go alone!"

Black Jack was already slipping cartridges into the empty loops of his belt. His eyes gleamed, and his teeth set tight.

"Get your hawses, men," he said quietly. "I'll look after the guns."

It hadn't occurred to him to ask a question or even to glance at his boys. They grabbed at their hats and broke for the corral on the run, Black Jack turned to Stevenson.

"Plenty shells at the store?" he asked.

"All kinds—plenty of them."

"Good! We'll need 'em. There'll be one —— of a fight!"

Black Jack always carried one gun, but none of the boys went armed about the ranch. Black Jack examined the six-shooters, hanging here and there around the bunks, saw to it that all were loaded and in working order, and laid each man's gun and belt upon his bunk. He then examined the rifles, and when that was done he went to a cupboard and secured his own extra gun and holster and slipped the holster on to his belt.

"How did Landers get wise to all this?" Black Jack inquired, turning to Stevenson, who was nervously pacing about the room.

"Old Vanderbilt happened to be there, visiting old Peg-leg," replied Stevenson. "He saw them kill Pressley, and that seems to have brightened his mind somewhat. At any rate he slipped away without being seen and hot-footed it down to the Landers' place. He told the story to Smith Landers and the boy brought it straight to me. I happened to know that Dave Hedges owned the controlling interest in the mine, and I saw at once that he and the other greenhorn owners had overlooked the annual assessment work. The rest of what I told you, I pieced out, but it is straight, at that."

"No doubt about Pressley, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid not. According to Vanderbilt's story they literally riddled him and left him lying on the back porch of the big dining-hall."

"Van is crazy, you know." Black Jack reminded him.

"All the better reason for believing him," returned Stevenson. "A normal man might have made up the yarn, but a crazy man never. I'm sure it is all straight."

"Like enough," agreed Black Jack. "And how about old Peg-leg?"

"Bound and gagged and lying on the back porch."

"Vanderbilt see any whisky?"

"Landers didn't say anything about that."

The boys were now arriving with the horses; the two men stepped outside. Ed Martin was leading Black Jack's Nig; Black Jack and Stevenson held the horses while the others gathered up their rifles and six-guns and mackinaws; within two minutes the little band of men was on its way to the store at a ground-covering lope, with Black Jack and Stevenson in the lead.

"There's ten of Hatfield's gang, I believe you said?" Black Jack inquired as they galloped along.

"Yes," replied Stevenson, "that was the number that Vanderbilt gave Landers."

"There's thirteen of us," Black Jack remarked, dubiously, "and I don't like that number. It's brought bad luck to me every time. We've got to change it, even if we have to drop a man."

"That's easily fixed," returned Stevenson. "Smith Landers will join us at the store. He's watching the place for me, but I'll lock it up as soon as we get our ammunition."

"Good!" said Black Jack quickly. "Him and me don't hitch, but the boy's got a certain kind of sand, and he's the best rifle shot in the valley—bar none."

Smith Landers was waiting on the porch when the party presently rode up to the store; the light from within streamed through the open door upon his long, gaunt figure.

"Just pile in, boys," said Stevenson as they dismounted, "and grab what you want. No time for ceremony."

A moment later Black Jack and Smith Landers stood face to face for the first time since the day of the inquest. Black Jack strode straight up to Landers; the boy stood his ground without flinching.

"You're with us?" Black Jack inquired shortly.

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"Sure, I'm with you," returned the boy easily.

Black Jack put out his hand.

"For tonight," he said.

"For tonight," replied Landers as he took Black Jack's hand.

Thus swiftly was the pact made and sealed, to endure until the present business was settled, and no longer.

The men crowded behind the counter and filled their belts and stuffed their pockets with cartridges; carefully loaded and tested the action of their rifles; then passed out to the porch while Stevenson put out the light and locked the door. A light snow was falling now, with a promise of heavy weather, but the night was far from being too dark for woodsmen to travel swiftly. They mounted and passed slowly across the bridge, then Black Jack set the pace at a swinging lope. Twenty minutes of hard riding brought them to the first sharp rise and they slowed to walk.

"Hard going, from here on," said Black Jack shortly. "Got to go easy for a spell; but I reckon there's plenty of time."

"We're in time," returned Stevenson, "but there's little to spare. That outfit may start to post their notices as early as eleven o'clock. We've got eight miles of hard going ahead of us, we'll be delayed some, getting our bearings and planning the attack. We haven't a moment to safely spare, because we've got to pen them all up in the mine buildings before they start out to post their notices. As I said before, if a single one gets by us he may get to the recorder's office and file on every claim there. Then we're done for!"

"I see where you're right," agreed Black Jack. "We've got to keep knicking right along."

THEY planned as they rode along, and at Bentley's Ford Black Jack called a halt.

"Listen, men," he snapped. "This is as far as we dare follow the road—no tellin' how far the sound of our hawses poundin' these rocks will carry. But there's soft ground on the left side of the creek, and we can chance it there for about two miles more. Then we've got to tie our hawses and hoof it the rest of the way. There's a log or two up there that we can cross the creek on.

"Now here's the plan——"

It was the efficient gun-fighter leader talking now, and at last Black Jack's experience was about to further a good purpose.

"This road," he continued, "runs past the mine and joins the Rockland road about a quarter of a mile above. There's a two hundred-foot bluff in front of the mine, droppin' straight to the road beside the creek. The hall sets back a ways from this bluff, and there's quite a passel of cabins between the hall and the bluff. There's a wood-road leadin' back into a cañon, and we've got to watch that. Now we'll slip along under this bluff and a-past the camp, and when we come to the Rockland road we'll double back. You, Martin, are to take Phelps and Slade and slip through the camp, among the cabins along the bluff, and guard that wood-road and all that end of the camp. There's plenty of wood-piles there, so get behind 'em and don't take no chances a-tall. Take a position about fifty yards beyond the hall, and when they run out, give 'em ——.

"Smith Landers is far and away the best hip-shot in the bunch—I've seen him bustin' jack-rabbits on the run, that-a-way—so I'm leavin' him to guard the Rockland road. I wouldn't give a whoop for the man's gizzard that tries to get a-past him, but to be on the safe side I'm leavin' young Hoyt with him. The rest of us will work our way in among the trees in back of the hall and make the attack from the rising ground behind it. The chances are ten to one that they've got some whisky along, and that we'll catch 'em all in the hall. The building is nothing but thin pine boards, and a .30-30 will slip through her like she was eggs. We'll pour a hail-storm of lead into them, and I'm bettin' them curs get out of there hot-foot! If they do, we'll fix 'em plenty; and I'm countin' on gettin' five or six of 'em before they can get their wits together and get out. The snow is comin' down heavier, and by the time we get there she'll be two inches deep, and that ought to be in our favor.

"Now listen. I'm placin' all three parties so they won't be shootin' up their friends. The wood-piles and the curve in the road will protect Landers and Hoyt. So keep your positions till you get orders from me; and maybe we can clean up on this —— bunch of curs without anybody gettin'

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killed. Come on, let's go, and no more gabbin' from now on. Get me?"

Black Jack now led the way into the heavy timber on the left side of the creek. Following a dim trail, sometimes picking his way carefully among the trees and through the brush, sometimes spurring his horse into a lope to cross a glade, he led the way for perhaps twenty minutes, then suddenly halted and peered sharply ahead.

"There's the big log across the creek," he said softly; "we'll leave the hawses here."

They dismounted and tied their horses to saplings, here and there, then gathered around Black Jack for further orders. The snow was coming in a torrent now, soft and light as thistledown. A full moon behind the clouds shed a soft radiance through them, and near-by objects could be plainly seen.

"It's safe to strike a match," said Black Jack quietly. "We will have a smoke and see what time it is."

Saying which, he struck a match and glanced at his watch.

"Nine-thirty," he said. "We've made good time; we'll be there in half an hour."

When the smokes had been lighted, Black Jack scrambled to the top of the log and led the way across the stream and on to the road. Already there was a thin blanket of snow, and they made scarcely a sound as they passed swiftly along at the base of the cliff. Black Jack, impatiently striding in the lead, halted suddenly, half-stifled an exclamation, then dropped to his knees. The others crowded close around a bulky, snow-mantled object which lay in the road.

"It's a man!" Black Jack muttered. "And he's smashed to a jelly! Fell over the cliff!"

He struck a match, extinguishing it instantly.

"By ——, men! It's Pressley! They've rolled him off the— Listen!"

The sound of men's voices came clearly from the brink of the cliff above. There was an oath and a hoarse laugh, then a dreadful swishing sound and a swirl of snow-laden air, followed by the horrible impact of a human body as it struck almost upon them. A chorus of laughter came from above, then the sound of men's voices receding from the brink of the cliff.

Black Jack waited for the whirling snow to settle, then crept forward, the others followed. He passed his hand over this second body, then swore softly, scarcely above whisper.

"It's old Peg-leg!" he said tensely. "Poor ——! They've murdered him, too. Pribably dumped him over alive! Men, there'll be no quarter on this job. We'll not get it, and we'd be —— fools to give it! Shoot first and talk afterward. That's all to it!"

"These men are past all human help," said Stevenson evenly. "Let us be on our way and kill these beasts that did this thing."

Black Jack rose and the party now passed on to the Rockland road, where Black Jack halted them. The road leading back to the mine formed an acute angle to the one they had just left, and was bordered with wood-piles which extended almost to the hall where Hatfield and his gang were quartered.

After a few terse orders from Black Jack the men separated into three parties and made their way to their appointed stations.

Smith Landers and young Willie Hoyt stopped behind a wood-pile some fifty yards from the hall, and prepared themselves to guard the Rockland road. Ed Morton, Andy Phelps and Emery Slade slipped along past cabins and wood-piles and took a position an equal distance beyond the hall. The main party stole silently along among the trees and stumps on the rising ground behind the hall.

There were lights in the main hall, but the big kitchen was dark. Loud shouts, followed by a roaring chorus of laughter, came from the hall as the men crept along the steep hillside. They had almost reached their places without detection, when Stevenson slipped and clutched a small tree for support, bringing down a deluge of fine snow. A shot rang out from the building, with a flash of fire from a dark kitchen window. Gene Laplante, following close behind Stevenson, dropped with a queer gasp to the ground. The lights in the hall went out.

"Behind the trees, men!" Black Jack shouted, then grasped Gene by a leg and dragged him to the shelter of a tree, barely in time to escape a volley from the dining-room windows. "Get ready, boys, and let 'em have it!" he ordered sharply. "Fire low and give 'em ——!"

He was answered by hoarse cries from the house, followed by another volley, then

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Black Jack's party opened fire. It was an unequal battle from the first. Thanks to Black Jack's careful planning his own party were well-protected by trees and stumps, while Hatfield's gang was caught between two fires, and the thin pine boards of the building were little or no protection against the slithering blast of steel-pointed rifle bullets.

The Hatfield gang's only advantage lay in the fact that they could not be exactly located; but Black Jack's own party occupied higher ground and were able to search out every nook and corner with their fire, while Ed Martin and his friends poured in a disconcerting cross-fire.

Black Jack's men riddled the building with bullets, while the men inside, not daring to show themselves at the windows, fired at random through the walls. Thus the battle went on for some time; Black Jack's men grimly silent, Hatfield's men shouting, groaning, cursing. Came a hideous blast of profanity, then the rattling of heavy boots upon the floor, as the gang, seeking shelter, ran frantically about inside.

Black Jack's men kept up a lively fire; two of the gang soon dashed from the front door and leaped from the porch. The moonlight sifted through the thin snow-clouds, there were no shadows, it was almost like daylight—a condition peculiar to snowstorms at high altitudes, when the moon is riding high.

Ed and his friends fired at once; one of the men dropped, the other fired a single shot from his six-shooter, then broke and ran. He seemed completely bewildered, and ran straight for the cliff. The boys kept up their fire, the runner dashed blindly on and plunged from the cliff.

"My ——!" Andy Phelps gasped. "He run straight off the bluff!"

"Sure did," agreed Ed easily as he worked another cartridge into place. "Pity the whole —— crew wasn't with him!"

Four of the gang now leaped from the building and ran swiftly down the Rockland road. Ed's party fired, one of the men dropped, the others disappeared behind a wood-pile at the turn in the road. The boys dared not follow, as this would bring them immediately into the line of Smith Landers' fire, as well as the blast that was still coming from Black Jack's immediate party.

"Landers will get the ——" declared Ed grimly, as he mechanically replenished the magazine of his rifle. "They'll never get by Smith Landers. You can bet on that!"

"Right," agreed Andy Phelps. "They'll never get a-past Smith. When they pass that place it will be feet first, with somebody carryin' them. I wish them fellers back of the hall would quit firing', so we could tell what's goin' on down below."

"Let's slip around and tell Black Jack," Emery Slade suggested.

"And get shot for one of Hatfield's gang!" Ed exclaimed disgustedly. "Your mind's a-wanderin', man! And didn't Black Jack tell us to hold our positions? What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"That's right," Emery admitted, "and what Black Jack says, goes with me, all the time!"

Smith Landers stepped from behind the wood-pile as the three running claim-jumpers approached; Hoyt opened fire across the top of the pile, and missed. Landers fired from the hip, at twenty yards, the leader dropped and rolled upon the ground. A second shot dropped another, the third man kept coming, firing an automatic pistol as he ran. Scarcely five yards separated them, and Smith Landers realized as he pulled the trigger that he was firing at Slim Hatfield. Hatfield's pistol flamed at the same instant and both men dropped to the ground. Landers lay moaning, Hatfield rolled painfully upon his elbow and raised his gun; his hand wavered as he trained the gun on Landers. Then Willie Hoyt redeemed himself for all time by leaping from behind the wood-pile and firing his rifle pointblank at Hatfield's head. The man went limp and settled back without a sound.

Ten minutes later Black Jack and his men were all assembled in the big kitchen. A roaring wood-fire crackled in the big range, and Gene Laplante lay on the cook's cot beside it. Smith Landers lay on the kitchen table, well bedded with blankets from Pressley's bed in the dining-room.

Gene's wound proved to be a mere stunning flesh wound in the neck, and would soon mend. Landers was more seriously injured, and Stevenson, who had some knowledge of surgery as well as nearly everything else, was making a careful examination, while Black Jack held the lamp.

"I think he will pull through, all right,"

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Stevenson presently observed, glancing up at Black Jack. "He hasn't bled much, and the heart action is nearly normal. The ball passed close to the heart, but it seems to have missed everything vital. At any rate it was a small-bore bullet; it passed through clean as a whistle, and if he isn't bleeding internally he'll pull through."

"—— lucky it was Hatfield's automatic!" declared Black Jack shortly. "If it had been a forty-four, now, salt wouldn't save him!" Black Jack's prejudice against automatics was without limit.

"How'd it happen?" demanded Black Jack, turning suddenly to Willie Hoyt, who stood at his elbow.

"The darn fool stepped right out from behind the wood-pile before he fired!" exclaimed Hoyt.

"The —— he did!" Black Jack flashed. "Landers done that! By ——, men! I reckon I've had the boy wrong all the time!"

Then Black Jack began nervously pacing the floor, with the lamp still in his hand. Stevenson watched Landers closely; the boy opened his eyes and asked for water. Stevenson gave the boy a drink, with the help of young Hoyt, then propped him up by means of an upturned chair-back slipped under the pillow. Black Jack passed the lamp to Hoyt, then stepped close to the improvised bed. He extended his hand, Landers managed to raise his hand a little, smiling wanly; Black Jack grasped it.

"I'd like to make it to the end of the road this time, Smith," he said, swallowing hard.

"All right," the boy whispered, "to the end of the road. Maybe it ain't far away."

"I accused you wrong," said Black Jack, still holding the boy's hand. "I know it now, and I'm sorry for it. That's all I can say. And don't talk about the end of the road bein' near. You're going to get well, boy, and I'd count it a favor if you'll let me call you my friend!"

The boy smiled as the old fighter pressed his hand, then Stevenson drove Black Jack away and began his task of dressing the wound. Black Jack turned and slipped in a pool of blood, then stared down at a crooked red line leading to where Andy Phelps stood near Gene's cot. He stepped close and glanced at a thin stream trickling down from Andy's dangling right hand.

"What the ——?" he demanded, grasping Andy by the shoulder and gently raising his injured arm.

"Just a scratch," declared the irrepressible Andy. "Nothin' but a skeeter bite. Bled a couple o' drops, that's all."

"Couple of drops, ——!" exclaimed Black Jack. "You've been bleedin' all over the place, man. Here, sit down, you soft head. Bring a basin of water, boys, and let's look this lunatic over."

"Nasty-lookin' hole, but no bones broke," Black Jack announced, looking up after a brief examination of a ragged hole in the thick muscles of the boy's forearm. "Bullet went through her like butter. Plenty of blood, but we can soon stop that. Stand a hot iron, boy?"

"Sure thing," replied Andy as the boys eased him down into a chair. "I'd sure hate to think I couldn't!"

"All right," said Black Jack tersely, "heat the poker, boys, while I wash her up. Best way in the world to stop heavy bleedin' and the safest. No blood-poison that-a-way, Andy."

The wound was seared, then bound up with a lard-saturated strip which had been torn from a pillow-slip. Andy managed a grin when the job was done, but the sweat poured from his face.

"Some hot in here!" he remarked as they rolled his sleeve down. "B'lieve I'll step out and get a little fresh air."

"No you don't!" said Black Jack shortly. "You'll faint if you try it. You're limber as a dishrag, right now. Here, fellas, let's get him away from this stove."

They carried him to a window and raised the sash, then Black Jack fanned the boy with his hat.

"Where did you get it?" Black Jack demanded.

"Out by the wood-pile," replied Andy. "Lucky, wasn't I? Last shot they fired before they lit out!" And Andy was young enough to mean every word of it.

"Why didn't you say something?" Black Jack demanded. "I've seen men bleed to death from less than that!"

"Aw, shut up!" returned Andy. "What the ——'d I want to belly-ache about a skeeter bite for, with the other boys all busted up that-a-way?"

"You're just a —— fool!" Black Jack said gruffly, but he gave the boy a look that made his heart sing.

When everything possible had been done

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for the wounded men, Black Jack led the way to the big dining-room. The place was a wreck. Tables and benches had been piled along the walls, the floor was littered with empty shells and guns and men's hats, and coats hastily discarded in the heat of battle. Everything had been splintered by bullets; four bodies lay scattered about, blood was everywhere.

Black Jack glanced around for a moment, then turned to Stevenson.

"No use examinin' the bodies," he said shortly; "nothing could live through a blast like that. They got what was comin' to them, and we'd just as well forget about it and fix up our own business. As I get it, the main idea is to locate these claims. I don't understand this business—it's out of my line, and nothing but a muddle to me. You spoke about explainin' matters when you got time. How about it?"

"It would take half the night to fully explain the situation," replied Stevenson, "and we haven't the time to spare. I will repeat what I told you before—to refresh your mind—then we've got to get busy.

"Mrs. Hedges doesn't own the ranch and livestock, really, because it is mortgaged for about all it is worth. She does, however—presuming that there is no will and that she will come into the Hedges property—own enough mine stock to control the Packjack mine.

"The assessment work necessary to hold unpatented claims has not been done for two years; consequently these claims are and have been open to location by anybody. Now, in the matter of assessment work, the law doesn't require that the work be completed during the particular year for which it is done; it is only necessary that the work be commenced before midnight on the last day of the year. Ordinarily the property would be safe if we began this work before twelve o'clock tonight; but the assessment work was not done for last year, and that might seriously complicate matters. So the safe way would seem to be to slip out and locate all of these claims as individuals. In that way, we've got the property safe, no matter what turns up. Later on we can either deed the claims back to the real owners, or do the assessment work and let our own rights lapse, as the case may require at the time."

"Sounds like good sense to me," said Black Jack. "Have you got the blanks?"

"I brought blanks," replied Stevenson, "but there's a lot of papers on that table over there and I have a notion they're location notices. Suppose we have a look."

"That listens like a good idea," said Black Jack as he led the way to the table.

The papers lay on one end of the table; a half-emptied demijohn of whisky occupied the other end, with the bullet-shattered parts of another lying scattered about.

"I knew there was whisky here," said Black Jack, shaking the demijohn. "And that partly accounts for the easy winnin' we pulled off. We've been lucky all the way through, and that shows the good sense of not startin' out with thirteen men. That number never brings anything but hard luck!"

Stevenson smiled surreptitiously as he turned to examine the papers.

"These are location notices," Stevenson presently observed. "They evidently have been filled in by some attorney at Tollman City or Rockland. They are complete except the names, and I suspect that they were about to fill in their names when we interrupted their labors. We are in luck again; all we have to do is to add our names and post the notices. Very kind of Mr. Harfield!"

Stevenson now sharpened his pencil and began filling in the names, while Black Jack instructed the boys as to the lay of the land and told them how to proceed in order to find the various old claim-stakes and monuments, nearly all of which he had become familiar with in riding the timber-range. The notices were soon ready; Stevenson distributed them around, and the boys were off.

Black Jack and Stevenson remained to look after the wounded men and to prepare supper. They ransacked the pantry, and when the boys came straggling back an hour or so later they were ready for them with a substantial meal.

There were four bodies still lying outside, and when the meal had been disposed of they carried them in and laid them out in a gruesome row in the dining-hall. This matter attended to, Black Jack called the men together and outlined his plans for the immediate future.

"Landers has got to have a doctor," he began abruptly. "The mine telephone is out of commission, so we've got to get down to the store as quick as we can. Martin

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and Slade will stay here to look after the wounded men; the rest of us will pick up the horses and beat it down to the valley. We'll phone from the store and give the sheriff an ear-full, and call up a doctor or two at Tollman City. Tomorrow we'll come back with two hacks; one to take the wounded men home, the other to bring out what is left of Peg-leg Faler and Jim Pressley. That's as far as I can dope it out right now."

Black Jack now turned abruptly and led the way to the kitchen, and after hearty handshakes all around and a cheerful chorus of "Good nights" the men filed through the door and out into the moonlit whiteness of a mountain snowstorm.

Thus happily ended the fight for the Packjack mine: A fight in which a little band of youngsters, headed by Black Jack and paged by Good Luck, wiped out the "Mort Ferman gang"; a league of cut-throats that had infested the Two-Color range for a generation and frequently had defied the world to come and get them.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. H. STEVENSON UNFOLDS A TALE

AT EIGHT o'clock in the evening of the day following the fight at the mine a quiet step sounded on the back veranda of the Hedges mansion, followed by a light, apologetic knock upon the door. Mrs. Hedges looked up from her knitting, Blossom Hedges laid her magazine aside; then, in response to the woman's prompt "come in" Mr. H. Stevenson entered, bowing right and left and carrying his "pie-crust" hat with ludicrous care. Mrs. Hedges rose and placed a chair; the caller refused to surrender his precious hat but accepted the proffered seat and drew another chair close as he sat down.

It had often been asserted—particularly in Hedges bunk-house circles—that Mr. H. Stevenson owned the only derby hat in the State, that he was inordinately proud of it, and that his anxiety concerning it and his careful handling of it was a thing for the world to applaud and wonder about.

Mr. H. Stevenson carried a small hand-bag, which he carefully placed upon the floor and between his feet, then deposited the hat with great care in the exact center of the adjoining chair. Having thus arranged his property to his taste, he cleared his throat apologetically and turned his attention to his hostess.

"I have called upon a little matter of business," he began. "It is not very pleasant business, madam. Quite the contrary, in fact."

Mr. H. Stevenson glanced at Mrs. Hedges, then at her daughter. The woman smiled.

"I have no secrets from my daughter, Mr. Stevenson," she said shortly.

"Very likely not," conceded Mr. H. Stevenson very softly. "That is not exactly what I had in mind, however. What I shall have to say concerns your late husband, and knowing him as you must know him, you will readily understand that my communication might easily be but ill adapted to the ears of his daughter."

"Blossom is a good girl, Mr. Stevenson," returned the woman, "but she has not been raised in anybody's bandbox. What I know, she knows. She has seen men killed, has seen a dozen dead men lying in a pile; she could put a bullet through your nice pie-crust hat at two hundred yards, my friend."

Mr. H. Stevenson glanced apprehensively at the brown derby; the women smiled.

"Say your say, Mr. Stevenson," the woman urged, "you will not disturb my daughter and we will not be shocked."

"Very well, madam," Stevenson agreed, "let it be as you wish. But remember I warned you. I meant only to spare the girl's feelings I assure you."

Mr. H. Stevenson paused to adjust his hat a microscopical fraction of an inch nearer the center of the chair, then turned again to his hostess.

"There were, perhaps," he said, "some things in the life of your late husband with which you were not familiar. For instance, you may recall that he was visited, a year or so ago, by a man named Fleetwood?"

"Yes," replied the woman, "I remember him quite well; a tall smooth-shaven, stooped man of about sixty. Yes, he stopped over night here."

"Just so, madam. Did you learn his mission, may I ask?"

"Certainly. He thought of buying the ranch and the sheep. He looked everything over very carefully."

"Just so, madam. That, no doubt, was

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the explanation your husband made to you. It was not the truth, however. Far from it! Are you prepared for a shock, madam—and miss? My first statement will surely shock you, but later on I shall make another which will largely counteract the first. On the whole, I may say that you have nothing to fear. Nothing serious, at any rate."

Having thus carefully prepared the minds of his audience, Mr. H. Stevenson plunged into the subject he had come to discuss, and thereafter struck straight from the shoulder.

"Mr. Fleetwood," he began, "was here, not to buy anything, but to look after a certain mortgage which he held against David Hedges. This mortgage, I am sorry to say, madam—and miss—was for no less a sum than three hundred and fifty thousand dollars!"

The woman was aghast. She stared at Stevenson, glanced dazedly at her daughter, stared again at the man. There was no such thing as questioning his sincerity.

"Surely," she managed to gasp at last, "surely this can not be true! There must be some mistake!"

"It is quite true, madam," returned Stevenson, "I have the documents here in my portmanteau to prove it beyond question."

The girl drew her chair close and linked her arm through her mother's. The woman suddenly recovered her composure.

"Tell us about it," she commanded shortly.

"I may as well begin," Stevenson responded, "by stating that Hedges, Fleetwood and myself were born and raised in the same village, back in old Missouri. Fleetwood made a great fortune in the Colorado mines, in after years, and that was how it came about that when Hedges needed money he turned to Fleetwood.

"Fleetwood was first here two years ago, but you did not see him at that time. Hedges kept the matter carefully under cover, but he borrowed three hundred thousand at that time, and gave a first mortgage on all the sheep for security. A year later, when Hedges wished to renew the mortgage and to increase it by fifty thousand, Fleetwood came on to see about the security. After looking the situation over, he decided to grant the increase only upon condition that Hedges give a new mortgage covering the ranch as well as the sheep. Hedges, badly in need of money at the time, finally agreed to this and gave a blanket mortgage covering everything."

"But how could he do that?" the woman exclaimed. "I never signed any such papers! He couldn't mortgage the real estate without my signature."

"That is easily explained." There was an odd quality to Mr. H. Stevenson's smile. "But," he added, "I will reserve that for its proper place. You know, of course, that I have been custodian of all of Hedge's private papers. I was more than that—I was, with certain reservations, a sharer of all his life's secrets. So, when it came to closing the deal, they met in my office and I made out the papers. As a notary I made out a mortgage covering everything, and Hedges signed it. I made out a release of the old mortgage and Fleetwood signed that. Smith Landers was there, by my arrangements, and he and I signed all around as witnesses; so everything was now complete, except your own signature.

"Hedges told Fleetwood that you would presently be along to sign, and suggested that in the mean time they take a walk a mile or so down the river and have a look at the big beaver dam, which Fleetwood had expressed a desire to see. Well, madam, when they returned, the papers all had your signature upon them. Fleetwood suspected nothing and carelessly pocketed the papers, then walked off arm-in-arm with Hedges. I put the release in the safe and thought no more about it for some time. This was at about nine o'clock in the morning; and perhaps an hour later they came back—on horseback this time—and crossed the bridge and struck out for the hills. I never saw them together again. I did not see Fleetwood again, and naturally supposed that he had, for some reason, gone back to Tollman City by way of Rockland.

"A month or so later Hedges came to my office one day and gave me a large envelop for safe-keeping. It had scribbled upon it the words 'Last Will and Testament of David Hedges,' with his name signed below. This seemed a perfectly natural thing for him to do, so I put the envelop away in the safe and thought no more about it until the day of the inquest."

Stevenson paused and nervously drummed the chair arm with his knuckles; the women watched him narrowly.

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"You may recall," he presently continued, "a long-haired, gray-bearded old man who attended the inquest and stood just within the front door. He spoke to no one, but watched like a hawk every move that was made and let no word escape him. Well, this man seemed familiar to me some way, so I made inquiry and learned that he was the half-crazed old prospector known as Vanderbilt, who lives in the old Blue Jay tunnel not far from the Packjack mine. I went home greatly puzzled about this man; and I studied and lay awake at night racking my brain about the matter for weeks. I called myself a fool and tried persistently to forget it, but it kept coming back, and at last the answer came. Vanderbilt was Fleetwood! That seemed wholly impossible on the face of it—he had grown a long beard and his hair had not been cut for nearly two years—but I have a very good memory for faces and I felt fairly sure of my ground. It was all very strange, there were tremendous possibilities in the case, so I determined at once to make sure of my ground.

"Now it happened that I had once helped Smith Landers out of a tight place, and he became a faithful friend. There is a lot of good stuff in that boy—worthless in many ways though he may be—and I found that I could trust him, absolutely. For certain reasons it was necessary to move with the greatest caution, so I got into communication with Landers, and through him arranged for a night call upon the man called Vanderbilt. Landers was on good terms with the old fellow, and the matter was easily arranged.

"I found Vanderbilt much as Landers had described him. His memory was almost a blank, and his mind at times wandered hopelessly, but within five minutes I knew beyond question that the man was Fleetwood. His story as I patched it out from almost five hours of his babbling, was substantially this: On the day when the papers had been made out in my office, Hedges enticed Fleetwood into the hills, upon the pretext of putting him wise to a good investment at the Packjack mine. But instead of taking him to the Packjack, he tolled him off into a cañon two or three miles this side of the mine and led him around to the old Blue Jay tunnel.

"There is a roofless, tumble-down old log-cabin standing near the mouth of the tunnel, and it seems that Hedges enticed Fleetwood into the cabin; then beat him over the head with his six-shooter, robbed him of the notes and mortgage and left him for dead. Hedges gathered some dry wood and piled it against the cabin, then set fire to it and went away expecting the body to be burned beyond the possibility of identification. But Fleetwood was not dead, as Hedges supposed, and the cabin did not burn. Rather the dry wood burned away, then the fire went out, and later on in some mysterious way Fleetwood was saved. His story became so wild at this point that I could make little of it; but I am compelled to think that Peg-leg Faler found him and pulled him through. It is also likely that the watchman slipped food to him from the company stores, and that he also furnished him with a gun and ammunition. To me there is no other possible explanation.

"Fleetwood knows that he was robbed, but in his present dazed condition he imagines he was robbed of money, instead of the papers, and it was his crazy tales about this "money" that gave rise to the name Vanderbilt. He has forgotten his right name, and has no more than a glimmering recollection of other things.

"That, I believe is all of the Fleetwood end of the story, except that I examined his head, and feel sure that a simple and not particularly dangerous operation will restore to him all of his faculties.

"And now I come to a different matter; and to get everything perfectly straight it will be necessary to drop back, for a moment, to a time some weeks prior to Fleetwood's first visit to Hedges—about three years ago. You know of course that Hedges bitterly hated Dan Reed, particularly after Reed shot him. As a matter of fact there never was a day after Hedges brought that bullet home that he would not have killed Reed, had he dared to do so. But Dan Reed was an exceedingly alert young man, and the opportunity was slow in coming.

"Now it happened that Hedges was one day drinking heavily in Tollman City and met, quite by chance, a certain young profligate from Philadelphia. This youth was named Allen Stover, and he was an only son of Fremont Stover, millionaire owner of the controlling interest in the Packjack mine. Young Stover was in bad repute

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with his father, and recently had been given the whole of this stock and told to go to it and either make a man of himself or to go to the —— as fast as he liked.

"The boy had gambled heavily, had borrowed to the limit on the stock, and at the time he met Hedges he was flat broke and unable to increase his loans. He told Hedges about this, in drunken confidence, and Hedges immediately conceived the big idea. He foresaw the recent slump in wool and sheep prices, and was already planning to get from under. His hatred for Dan Reed amounted almost to insanity, you understand, and the Packjack management was at that time about to pay Reed fifty thousand dollars for his power-site. This thought all but drove Hedges crazy; he was prepared to make almost any sacrifice to prevent Reed from getting this money, and this seemed like a heaven-sent chance. By buying this stock from Stover he could control the mine and prevent Reed from selling, so he got into touch with Fleetwood and borrowed the money and bought the stock, outright.

"Then, within a few days, he fathered another idea—Reed was making a good living from his road-house while the mine was running; he'd shut the mine down and starve Reed out, then buy the power-site for a song, and whatever loss he might incur at the mine he'd make up in the price of the power-site and through the freezing out of minority stockholders.

"Of course he realized that Reed might hang on for a good while and the loss at the mine might be pretty heavy, but he figured that the ore would still be in the mine, and by adding another battery of stamps to the mill he could catch up in a few months and thus inevitably come out ahead in the long run. So he shut the mine down, working under cover in a manner which I shall presently explain, and fell to licking his lips over his coming triumph over Dan Reed.

"But he underrated Reed all the time from first to last. Reed was a miner and he knew that soon or late, as depth increased and power bills mounted, the mine would be compelled to buy his power-site; so he hung grimly on and in the end Hedges became desperate. Then Reed was found dead in the woods, crushed by a falling tree."

"How much do you know about that?" Mrs. Hedges inquired abruptly. "Did Dave kill Dan Reed?"

"I do not know positively," replied Stevenson. "There was a limit to Hedges' confidences; he never made a positive statement about that. But he used to grin and look wise whenever the subject came up, and I have no doubt that he deliberately murdered Dan Reed."

"With Reed out of the way," Stevenson continued, "Hedges expected an easy settlement with the widow. He made her a number of offers—through his attorney, of course—but she turned them all down without ceremony, and so the matter dragged along month after month until Hedges was killed.

"Such, madam—and miss—are the principal inside facts as far as they are known to me. No doubt there are strange angles to the story—things which you do not understand—and I am ready to answer frankly any questions you care to ask."

Mrs. Hedges remained in a scowling brown study for some time; the girl seemed unable to remove her glance from the visitor's face. The older woman looked up; there were tears in her eyes.

"So that was what all the trouble was about at the mine last night," she said, unsteadily. "You were all fighting for us—for Blossom and me! I couldn't understand it—before."

"You might put it that way," Stevenson admitted simply.

"The wounded men are all right? They will get well?"

"We think so, madam; there may be some doubt in Smith Landers' case, but the others are in no danger."

"And that poor boy was risking his life for us! I am sick with shame after all that has gone before!"

"You should not allow your mind to dwell upon those matters," Stevenson urged. "The mine is safe now, and I feel sure that Landers will recover. I have not made everything quite clear—have you no questions to ask?"

"I am curious," said Blossom Hedges quickly, "to know why Mr. Fleetwood's people have not been seeking him. That seems strange to me, Mr. Stevenson."

"Fleetwood had no family," returned Stevenson. "He was a queer sort of a man, too; and quite likely he informed nobody when he set out to come here, and

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it would not be strange if random inquiries failed to penetrate to this out-of-the-way place."

"I should like to know about the signatures on those papers," Mrs. Hedges interposed. "They were forged, of course."

Mr. H. Stevenson dropped his eyes and stared long at the floor.

"That," he said finally, meeting the woman's eyes, "is the part I have dreaded. There is no dodging it; however—it must be told. I will tell you the truth, and you can decide my case. Briefly, when I was a very young man—a mere boy, in fact—I was guilty of an indiscretion which finally wrecked my life. It started as a mere boyish prank, but, through a little carelessness and bad luck, developed into a serious crime in the eyes of the law. Dave Hedges knew about it and might have sent me to prison for many years had he cared to do so. There would have been no profit in that, however, so he held it in reserve; and when the time came and he needed a man for his dirty work here, he sent for me and I dared not refuse. I have been his slave ever since—nearly thirty years—and I forged your name to all of the papers. That, madam—and miss—is the bitter truth!"

Mrs. Hedges put her handkerchief to her mouth and thoughtfully regarded her visitor for some time. The girl sighed, a fine sympathy shone from her eyes. There was no reproach in the woman's voice when she finally spoke, only a little note of sorrow.

"It is all clear, now," she said. "It is not much of a surprize, after all. It will be best not to think about it, nor mention it again. And this mining-stock, now? You know where it is?"

"I have it here," replied Stevenson, setting the hand-bag on the table. He opened the bag and spilled out the contents, then selected a large envelop and passed it to the woman.

"That," he said, "is the envelop I mentioned—the one supposed to contain Hedges' will. I think you will find Fleetwood's mortgage in it."

It proved to be the mortgage, when the woman presently drew it from the envelop and spread it out. She looked puzzled.

"Why," she ventured, "do you suppose Dave kept this so carefully? Why didn't he destroy it?"

"That I do not know," replied Stevenson. "He may have neglected the matter for a day or two, and in the mean time discovered that Fleetwood was alive. In that case he would naturally keep it to trade upon in case he fell afoul of the law."

The woman pondered; the man smiled.

"Here," he said, passing her a large bundle of ornately engraved stock certificates. "Here is something more to the purpose."

Mrs. Hedges removed the rubber band and, selecting one of the certificates, glanced at the seal and attest of transfer.

"I do not understand," she said dubiously. "This is in the name of O. H. Stevenson."

"I am O. H. Stevenson," explained her visitor briefly.

The woman stared.

"You said this stock belonged to Dave," she said finally. "How does it come to be in your name?"

"Well," replied Stevenson, "Hedges was a stealthy sort, you know, and it was only natural for him to work under cover; and he thought he could handle Reed better in that way. Further than that, he planned to make a mystery of the whole matter, in order to spring a grandstand surprize on everybody when the proper time came."

"You might have kept this stock for yourself," the woman suggested. "There wasn't a thing to hinder, apparently."

"It might have been done—at any time after Hedges' death," Stevenson admitted.

"And we would have been bankrupt," the woman continued thoughtfully. "You have certainly played fair with us, Mr. Stevenson, and we appreciate what you have done. I can say no more. And we can do something, I am sure, to make amends in some slight degree for all you have endured at the hands of Dave Hedges."

"I ask no pay," returned Stevenson, "for doing my duty at this late date. I have a plan, however, and hope to earn enough to clear the mortgage on my store. I am in touch with a man who will buy the ranch, if you wish to sell. If you wish to sell the mine stock and pay off the Fleetwood mortgage, I will attend to that for you. When everything is settled, if you care to do so, you may release the mortgage on my store. That is all I ask."

"We'll keep the ranch, mother!" the girl exclaimed quickly.

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"Yes," replied her mother without hesitation, "we'll keep the ranch. And you, Mr. Stevenson, shall have your mortgage, and more too. Another thing—before we sell this mine stock we must see to it that Mrs. Reed gets her money for that power-site. That we must attend to. And we must look after poor Mr. Fleetwood!"

"I have attended to that," returned Stevenson. "Fleetwood is already on his way to the Tollman City hospital. I made the arrangements immediately I was sure of my ground."

"I am glad that has been attended to," said Mrs. Hedges. "Everything seems to be coming out all right, at last. There are one or two things which are not yet clear, but I think perhaps we had best not be too inquisitive. One thing I should like to know, however. Do you know who killed Dave Hedges?"

"No," replied Stevenson after some hesitation, "I do not. I believed with Black Jack for a long time—believed that Smith Landers was the guilty man; but after the fight at the mine— Well, it was rather remarkable! Landers refused to take advantage of the cover afforded by the wood-pile; he stepped from behind it to face his enemies in the open before he fired. That convinced Black Jack. He reasoned that if Landers deliberately exposed himself in that manner, he'd hardly shoot a man down from behind a stump. So Black Jack exonerated the boy, and I am inclined to carry with him."

"Black Jack exonerated Smith Landers!" the woman exclaimed indredulously. "Well, of all things! Thank God for that! Black Jack Rogers is pretty much of a man, Mr. Stevenson, after all is said and done."

"Yes," agreed Stevenson, "Black Jack is pretty much of a man. He has done terrible things, in his time, but it was always in a fair fight—man to man—and the old fighter lives strictly up to his code. Dave Hedges' influence was bad, too. —— ba— I beg your pardon!"

Mrs. Hedges smiled; the girl laughed outright.

"I quite agree with you," said Mrs. Hedges. "Dave's influence over Black Jack was —— bad!"

Stevenson looked properly shocked, but there was a hint of a smile in his eyes.

"Quite so, madam, just so!" he said shortly.

"How about this envelop?" Mrs. Hedges inquired abruptly, picking up the one that had contained the Fleetwood mortgage. "It was sealed when Dave gave it to you for safe-keeping?"

"Yes," replied Stevenson shortly, "it was sealed."

"And it was sealed when you gave it to me," said Mrs. Hedges. "How did you know that the mortgage was in it, and why didn't you turn it over to the court?"

Stevenson caressed his chin and stared at the ceiling.

"Well," he replied finally, glancing at Mrs. Hedges, "Dave was a queer man, you know. Queer and tricky. It would have been just like him to cut you out of the bulk of his property, which he could do under the law in this State. So I— Well, I opened the envelop, you see."

"And why, may I ask? Just idle curiosity, was it?"

"Well, not exactly. You understand, of course, that in the absence of a will you come into all of this property."

"Yes, I understand that. And if this envelope had contained a will——?"

"Why, naturally, if it had cut you out of the property nobody ever would have seen it again."

"And I would have come into the property anyhow?"

"Certainly, madam. Quite so."

"Well!" exclaimed the woman. "Don't that beat the d—— I beg your pardon!"

The women laughed; the man's face was a mask.

"Quite so, madam," he said solemnly.

"Perhaps this envelop did contain a will—when you got it?" Mrs. Hedges suggested.

"Perhaps it did," returned Stevenson. "Perhaps not. Who knows? Quite so, madam, quite so."

"Quite so," the woman repeated, "and no doubt the less said about it, the better. There is one thing more, Mr. Stevenson, it was strange about Dave's gun and belt, don't you think? Some one fired a shot from a rifle at the time Black Jack and Gene recovered Dave's body; don't you think it might have been Fleetwood, and that he killed Dave and took the gun and belt?"

"It was Fleetwood who fired the shot," returned Stevenson. "He told me about it and thought it a great joke—the manner in

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which Black Jack and Gene got under cover. But he said nothing about the killing, or the gun and belt. If Hedges had been killed with a rifle I could easily believe that Fleetwood did the deed, but the automatic pistol bullets make it extremely doubtful. Still, he might have done it—but Smith Landers had been there some time during the day, and that complicates everything."

"Well," said the woman thoughtfully, "it seems likely to remain a mystery for a long time. I am much disposed to think that Dave was justly killed, and shall therefore withdraw the reward and let the whole thing drop."

Mr. O. H. Stevenson rose and took possession of his cherished pie-crust hat and his now empty portmanteau, then bowed right and left to the two ladies.

"It is growing late, madam—and miss," he said, "and I will no longer intrude. If there is nothing more, I will bid you good evening and return to my place."

"Not until you have shaken hands with my daughter and myself," said Mrs. Hedges, rising and extending her hand. "We wish to thank you heartily for what you have done, and we wish you much better luck in the future than you have had in the past."

Mr. O. H. Stevenson expressed his thanks as he shook hands with the ladies, then passed out with a pleasant "good night," carefully setting the pie-crust hat upon his head as he stepped from the porch.

CHAPTER IX

BLACK JACK MUDDLES THROUGH

THE days following the battle at the mine were busy ones for Black Jack Rogers. First the wounded men had to be removed to their homes, then came the ghastly business of gathering up the bodies and the formality of an inquest. There had been a trip to Rockland to hire miners for the location work on the various claims, and following that, a conference at the mansion with Stevenson and Mrs. Hedges in regard to the Packjack mine. Stevenson had suggested that the mine stock would surely sell to much better advantage with the mind in operation, and Mrs. Hedges had decided to open it up at once. She had mentioned the power-site matter and was reminded by Stevenson that there were no funds with which to buy it. The woman had persisted, however, and in the end a scheme had been devised whereby it was planned to have Mrs. Hedges enter into a contract with the Reed woman before the stock was sold, and thus compel the future owners to purchase the site.

Black Jack, equipped with a hack and feather ticks, with his saddle horse leading behind, and with Ed Martin to help, had personally attended to the business of removing Smith Landers to his home; where two doctors, after a long council, decided that with proper care the boy would surely pull through.

Black Jack had sent the team home by Ed Martin and remained to sit up with Landers during the night. The boy had been restless and more or less delirious, and he had talked much. It had been a mere confused jumble of words, for the most part meaningless to Black Jack, but now and again the little widow's name had rung out sharp and clear. This was rather a surprize to him; he did not understand; so he weighed the matter carefully and at last decided to send for her as soon as possible.

He had returned to the ranch in the early morning, and had immediately dispatched Ed Martin with the hack to notify the little widow. She had promptly volunteered to nurse the boy, and thus it came about that Black Jack, when he went in the evening to see Landers, came face to face with the little widow for the first time.

He found her sitting alone beside the bed; the boy seemed to be quietly sleeping. Black Jack nodded, the women sprang to her feet and stood grasping the back of the chair with her right hand. She stared at Black Jack for a moment; quite evidently she was a bit frightened. Black Jack smiled, the woman recovered her composure at once and placed the fingers of her left hand warningly upon her lips; and Black Jack observed that the thumb was missing from her left hand. This peculiarity made no particular impression at the moment, and Black Jack now turned his attention to the patient.

He stepped to the bedside and stood looking down at the haggard face on the pillow; the woman came and stood beside him. They talked in whispers; the woman told him that the boy was getting along very

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nicely and had practically passed the danger point; then she brought another chair and they both sat down. They talked quietly about the patient for a time; the woman presently put out her left hand to adjust the covers, and Black Jack's attention was again attracted to the missing thumb. It was clear that the wound was of recent occurrence, and that it had been very unskilfully handled. The stump was more or less rough and not as yet completely healed. The woman flushed when she observed Black Jack's glance; she was much confused, and his curiosity was thoroughly aroused.

"You seem to have met with an accident lately," said Black Jack abruptly with a glance at the wound.

"Yes," returned the woman, quietly, "I was careless enough to get my thumb mangled in a sausage grinder. It wasn't very pleasant at the time."

"I should say not," returned Black Jack. "You must have had a time with it!"

"I certainly did!" she replied. "There was no chance to get help in that out-of-the-way place, you know, so I had to dress it myself. I'm afraid I didn't make a very good job of it," she added, caressing the injury with her right hand."

"I reckon not," returned Black Jack shortly.

The little widow now abruptly turned the subject again to the patient, and Black Jack, after being assured that he could be of no particular assistance at present, took his leave and returned to the ranch.

There was much to do in making ready for a Winter's run at the Packjack mine, and Black Jack was a busy man these days. There were miners to hire, and millmen and timbermen and cooks, and the Winter's supplies must be hauled in before the heavy snows came. There was the location work to supervise, then the recording had to be attended to, and there were a hundred minor matters to look after around the ranch.

He had little time to give to the subject, but the matter of the little widow's injured thumb intrigued him, and at times he reflected about it seriously. Inevitably, too, whenever he thought about the widow and her injured thumb his mind reverted to the little automatic shell he had picked up in the midst of Gene's tracks at the scene of the tragedy.

GENE was up and around within a day or two, and outwardly they were on the best of terms again, but there was an undercurrent of reserve and, on Black Jack's part, suspicion. In the presence of the frank and outspoken Gene, his distrust usually vanished completely, but at other times it returned to almost torture him. It seemed an unworthy thing to harbor suspicion concerning a man with whom he pretended to be and sincerely wished to be friends, but he could not drive from his mind the thought that Gene and the little widow, the shell and the injured thumb were in some way connected, and that if ever he got to the bottom of it he'd find the solution to the Hedges mystery.

So the matter increasingly perplexed and worried him, and in the end he took advantage of the little widow's absence and thoroughly searched the road-house again. Particularly he looked for a sausage grinder, in the out-buildings as well as the main house, but he failed to find one, and now it appeared that the little widow had deliberately lied to him. He had found neither sausage mill nor sausage, there was no evidence indicating that the woman had kept pigs, and he therefore felt pretty sure of his ground. The woman had lied, and that's all there was to it.

And why had she lied about it? he asked himself as he rode home. Such injuries were a very rare thing with women; he could not recall a similar one. In what manner had the thumb been lost? Had it been shot off? Ah, that was probably the answer! But when and where? Surely he had examined the ground too carefully to admit that the woman could possibly have been present at the killing. The idea was preposterous! He rode along slowly pondering for a mile or two, then suddenly reined his horse to a stand and spat out a mouth-filling oath.

"Great ——!" he went on explosively. "What a fool I've been! Dave never was killed at that place, at all! The whole —— thing was a plant. Dave was shot down somewhere else, and carried to that place. That's the straight of it, sure as ——! And glory be! That lets Gene out!"

Then Black Jack set spurs to his horse and sent him galloping along the trail.

Strange how light his heart was when he thought of Gene. How glorious to dash

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along on a good horse with *that* foul thing clear of his mind!

Gene had been at the ranch less than two years, but Black Jack had liked him from the first day and they had been close friends. Gene was so honest, so frank, so outspoken and square about everything. He had loved him, if ever a man may be said to love another, and now that Gene stood clear he felt like shouting.

So Black Jack rode home, happier than ever he had been before in all of his life. He planned to apologize to Gene, to have a nice long talk, and to have the honest handshake they had once promised themselves, but it was strictly a private matter between Gene and himself, and the opportunity he sought was slow in coming.

Thus several days slipped by, then one day as the boys smoked their after-dinner cigarets in the bunk-house the subject of the "leetle Red-bug hawse" came up. The work was pretty well caught up, there was nothing pressing, and Ed Martin was planning to have another try at riding the Red-bug. Black Jack shook his head when Ed asked permission to make the trial.

"No, Ed," he said shortly, "you keep off'n that hawse. You are still a mite lame, and maybe you always will be, though I hope not. Anyhow you ain't in no shape to ride, yet awhile. The Red-bug would pile you, sure. You keep off'n him. If he's got to be rode, I'll ride him myself."

The boys were astonished. Black Jack had been known as the best rider in the Two-Color country, but of late years he had been content to rest upon his laurels and leave the "busting" to the younger men. The boys stared, this was too good to be true! Andy Phelps was the first to find his tongue.

"By heck, fellers!" he exclaimed. "Now we will see some fun. When a man that's never been throwed, meets up with a hawse that's never been rode— Oh, boy!"

"Leetle Red-bug hawse," drawled Gene, "I am see your feenish! Long tam now you crop thees grass and keek up those heel and laugh lak crazy coyote—now you mak acquaintance weeth leetle hones' work. You sure ketch —— now!"

Black Jack grinned.

"Get a rope on him," he ordered, "I'm ridin' up to see Antone—back in half an hour. Then I'll fork him.

An hour later the Red-bug was trembling under Black Jack's time-battered old saddle, with Black Jack working at the cinch. Mrs. Hedges and Blossom had been notified, and everybody was on hand to watch the fun. The general opinion was that Black Jack would gentle the Red-bug, but the horse never had been ridden; he was famous from one end of the Two-Color to another as an outlaw without an equal, and there was a leaven of doubt.

Unaccountably warm weather had followed the New Year's storm, and the ground was again bare and firm—ideal for the battle between unbeaten horse and unbeaten man.

"Better you tie on couple of pillow," Gene suggested as Black Jack tugged at the cinch. "You ask Ed 'bout that. He know all 'bout such matters."

"No pillers goes, with me," declared Ed emphatically. "Me for the good old feather-ticks, next time. Ain't enough body to no piller, when a feller's ridin' the Red-bug, believe me!

"Want a little rosin for your saddle-horn?" Andy Phelps inquired anxiously. "A feller gets a lot better grip, that-a-way. Take my advice, Black Jack, and sprinkle a little of Gene's fiddle rosin on your mitts."

"Better take Blossom's camera along," suggested Ed, "and take a bird's-eye shot at the ranch while you're up there. She's one grand little view! I had a good look at her, time I got my hip busted."

Every one had a dig at Black Jack, and at last all was ready. Black Jack swung into the saddle and grasped the rope end, then took off his hat.

"All right," he said, "let him go."

The boys pulled off the blind; the Red-bug stood perfectly still, Black Jack touched him with a spur, and the horse went wild. He bucked straightaway for twenty yards, then, suddenly, as a rabbit dodges a dog, he leaped a full ten feet sharply to the left to stop dead in his tracks and leap with incredible speed to the right. Black Jack swayed and seemed about to lose his seat but recovered his balance as the horse struck the ground. He struck the Red-bug over the ears with his hat; the horse plunged straight for the corral fence, then blindly into it, and horse and rider were half-obscured by dust and flying rails as the fence gave way. A rail struck Black Jack across the head, he swayed drunkenly in

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the saddle and must have fallen, had not the horse been a little dazed and checked in his mad career for a moment.

The Red-bug stood quivering for an instant, then renewed the contest with the utmost venom and vigor, bawling, plunging, sunfishing, bringing into play every trick he knew. At last he reared, stood balancing on his hind feet for a moment, then tipped over straight back. Black Jack squirmed from the saddle as the horse went down, the Red-bug struck squarely upon his back and drove the saddle-horn deep in the ground, the man rolled full length in the sand. The horse was quick, but the man was far quicker, and when the Red-bug regained his feet the man rose with him, firmly in the saddle again.

And so the contest raged savagely for twenty long, heart-breaking minutes. Again and again the horse tried every trick he knew; again and again he reared and toppled over backward; but each time when the Red-bug struggled to his feet, the man, incredibly, was there in the saddle rising with him. The horse was a lather of sweat, the blood streamed from Black Jack's ears and nose; the horse reared and bucked and bawled and groaned; the man, white-faced, grim-eyed, determined, with set jaws, spurred till the horse was red, and fought on with never a thought of defeat.

At last the Red-bug began to tire and the vim slowly to ooze out of him, and in the end, reeking, quivering in every fiber, panting like a heat-stricken dog, he gave it up and stood meek and beaten while Black Jack "scratched" him from neck to tail, and fanned him with his hat and pulled his hitherto inviolate ears, and visited upon him every insult known to the cowboy's list of bronco-bait.

When it was clear that nothing more could be got out of the Red-bug, that he was through and wished for nothing but rest and peace, or a chance to die miserably, Black Jack dismounted and began wiping the blood from his face. Everybody crowded around him, cheering, slapping him on the back, declaring enthusiastically that it was the greatest ride they ever had seen. And it was.

Black Jack was trembling like a leaf; he could scarcely stand alone.

"Worst ride I ever had," he gasped, "and the last. Never again!"

"You shore hit that fence!" exclaimed Andy Phelps. "I never thought any livin' thing could go through her like that. Lucky you didn't get your fool brains knocked out!"

"Fool brains is right," returned Black Jack. "The way to gentle a hawse like that is to do it with a six-gun. Then bury him."

Gene Laplante was tormented by many conflicting emotions as he surveyed the wreck of what had once been "that cocky leetle Red-bug hawse." It had been a source of pride to own a horse that no man ever had been able to ride; at the same time the animal was vicious and defiant and wholly unmanageable, and Gene was disposed to crow, now that he had been decisively beaten. He pulled his ears; the Red-bug seemed scarcely aware of it.

"My land!" Gene exclaimed ironically. "Your deesposeetion she ees much improve lately! Your manners she ees get better all tam. By an' by you tak up weeth Sunday-school—maybe! My neck—eef she was no so stiff, I ride you leetle myself!"

Then Gene pulled off saddle and hackamore and turned the Red-bug loose to wander at will until the corral fence was repaired.

Black Jack felt too badly bunged up to make his usual daily call upon Smith Landers, so he sent Emery Slade to make his apologies and explain the situation; then, after a few terse orders to the men, he retired to the bunk-house. He washed off the blood and changed clothes, then threw himself on his bunk, where he rested until Slade returned, two hours later.

He was half-asleep when Slade came in.

"How's the boy gettin' on?" he inquired sleepily.

"Fine and dandy," returned Slade. "He set up for an hour this morning and again this afternoon. The widder thinks he'll be all right, now, and she wanted to go home, so Fred took her along in the hack."

"Good!" said Black Jack. "And that bein' the case I'll just roll over and snooze till supper-time."

Slade smiled over the idea of the old fighter sleeping in the daytime, but he said nothing and presently slipped out to report the good news to the other boys.

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IMMEDIATELY following supper that evening, Gene shaved and changed clothes, then, collar and tie in hand, made his way to the mirror to finish his toilet. The boys were lounging about, smoking their cigarets and chatting, and the talk presently turned to James Pressley, lately killed at the Packjack mine and later buried in the Tollman City cemetery. News had come that the body was to be disinterred and shipped to relatives in the East, and curiosity revived as to what Pressley's real mission at the Packjack mine had been. Black Jack smiled as he listened to the various wild conjectures, then settled it all in a sentence.

"You fellows make me tired," he said finally, "tryin' to make some kind of a romance out of Pressley. He was simply a mining-engineer sent here by Eastern stockholders to examine the mine. That's all there was to it."

"I knew it all the time," Ed Martin declared virtuously. "Been talkin' to you fellers with tears in my eyes—tryin' to temper you down a little and learn you some sense. But it can't be done!"

"Like —— you've been tryin' to temper somebody down!" exclaimed Andy. "I reckon you ain't the very feller that started it, hey? Set here, he did, and shot his face off for an hour—night or two before the Packjack dance—tellin' us about this here Pressley, and what a great feller he was, and for us to keep our eye on him, because he was go'n'ta turn the whole country wrong side out before he got through. 'Name's Preesley,' says Ed. 'Pale sort of chap. City feller. Keen eye,' says he. 'Brains, you know. Look out for him,' says this here prophet of ours, 'he's bad medicine.' What do you fellers think of this here bunkhouse prophet, anyhow?"

Ed sat grinning.

"Pour it on!" he complained. "Pour it on! I ain't got no friends anyhow! Now listen. What was it I said about Pressley? I said he wasn't no watchman. And, by heck, he wasn't! You-all heard what Black Jack said. Pressley was a minin' engineer. That's what he was; and I was right about it all the time."

"My land!" exclaimed Gene. "You fella *parlay* all night and no say nothing. You mak talk lak you go to thees store. Why you no do it and geev Black Jack leetle rest? He no feel ver' good for ride thees leetle Red-bug hawse lak ——. Get scarce! Skeep out!"

Thus reminded of their plan the boys presently "skeeped out," leaving the bunkhouse to Black Jack and Gene. Black Jack had been planning to have his little talk with Gene tonight while the boys were at the store; but Gene evidently intended to call upon the little widow and probably would not particularly relish being delayed, so he decided to postpone the matter until there should be plenty of time.

Gene stood before the little mirror, putting the finishing touches to his toilet; Black Jack watched him, carelessly at first, then with growing interest. He studied Gene as he smoothed his mustache and fussed with his tie; thoughts of the little widow's injured thumb and the automatic shell and Gene's tracks edged their way into his mind, and the old suspicions revived.

Gene presently departed, with a cheerful "good-night, frien';" Black Jack watched from the window while Gene mounted his horse and splashed through the ford, then turned swiftly and picked up his hat. He reached the door in three quick strides, then hesitated with his hand on the latch.

"——!" he exclaimed aloud. "It's a dirty rotten trick, but I've got to do it! Just this once—if nothing turns up tonight, I'll ditch the whole business for good and all."

Saying which, he hastened to the corral and saddled his horse, and five minutes later he was hot on Gene's trail. Neither suspected it, but this was to prove the most eventful night in the lives of both of them.

The road was level for two miles, and Black Jack rode at a lively canter until he came to the first steep pitch in the edge of timber. From this point on he rode cautiously, pausing now and again to listen and peer ahead, for he was heartily ashamed of his errand and had little stomach for the thought of being caught in the act. He saw nothing of Gene, however, and when he presently approached the Reed place he dismounted some distance from the house. He led his horse into a clump of bushes and tied him securely, then went cautiously around and approached the house from the rear. A light showed in the dining-room windows; Black Jack dropped to his knees and crept cautiously through the bushes and up to the house.

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A vine grew over one of the windows, and Black Jack rose to his feet to peer through it at the homey scene inside the room. A cheerful wood-fire burned in the big fireplace, and the window had been raised a bit for fresh air. The vine, and the cheap lace curtain swaying gently in the evening breeze, offered little obstruction to his view, while affording some measure of protection to himself. Through the partly opened window he could hear distinctly every word that was said.

The little widow sat in a rocker, deftly plying a needle, Gene was seated in another rocker, quite close, with little Daisy on his knee. Gene was smiling down at the child, while she played with his watch-chain. The pelt of a recently killed wildcat lay on a newspaper near one corner of the room; the little widow was giving Gene a lively account of the killing, which had taken place in her chicken-house earlier in the evening.

"You no much skeer for thees cat, maybe?" said Gene when the woman concluded her story.

"Oh, yes," replied the widow, "I was frightened, but it simply had to be done, you know—with no men-folks around."

Gene smiled, then turned his attention more particularly to the child.

"How you lak for have sometheeng lak thees?" he asked, pulling his watch from his pocket and handing it to the girl.

The child was delighted and smiled up at Gene as she took the watch.

"I lak eet ver' much," she replied, unconsciously imitating Gene's dialect.

"I am theenk, me, I have to buy you one, sometam," said Gene, smiling.

The woman caught the note of sincerity in Gene's voice.

"No, no," she protested. "She would only break it. Watches are not for children, you know."

"No, mamma, I wouldn't break it," said the girl wistfully, "I'd be ever so tareful!"

"All right," said Gene, "I breeng you one for your birthday, maybe. When ees thees birthday, now? I am forget, me."

"Oh, it's tomorrow!" exclaimed Daisy, gleefully. "Just one more night and I'll be——"

"How ol' you gon' be tomorrow?" Gene interrupted.

"I'll be five," replied the child, dropping the watch to clap her hands. "I've been four for ever so long—years and years—and tomorrow I'll be five. Won't that be nice?"

"Five!" exclaimed Gene in mock surprize. "My lan'! You get for be ol' woman now. Well, well! I am remember now—I know 'bout thees birthday long tam ago. I am no see how I am forgeet so easy. Eet ees too bad! But nex' tam I no forgeet. Nex' year I breeng you something ver' nice."

The child pouted; Gene thought she was about to cry.

"Wait, wait!" he exclaimed hastily as his hand flew to his pocket. "Don' you go for cry! I no lak for see water een thees pretty eye—she maybe mak you blind. I been theenk on thees birthday for long tam now, and I am breeng along one leetle trinket for mak you happy."

Then Gene drew from his coat pocket a dainty little pasteboard box, securely bound with a bit of red ribbon. The girl slipped from Gene's knee and danced about in a fever of expectation while Gene's clumsy fingers labored with the knots, and she screamed with delight when he presently held up a pretty little gun-metal watch and a long, gold-plated chain.

"Wait leetle minute," Gene protested, holding the watch out of reach of the child and restoring his own watch to his pocket. "Wait leetle minute. I bound for say we fin' sometheeng inside thees watch eef we look close."

Gene opened the case and held the watch before the child.

"You look on thees letters and tell me what she ees say," he commanded.

The girl puzzled over the engraving for a moment, then glanced up at Gene.

"I don't know what she ees say, Gene," she said. "I can't read yet—only a few letters—you read it, please."

"Me? I can no read, either," returned Gene. "But I am boun' for say I know what thees letters ees spell. She ees spell, 'Daisy Reed, from Uncle Gene.' "

"Uncle Gene!" shrilled the child, her eyes on fire. "Oh, mamma! Just look!" she added, then clutched the watch and ran to her mother.

The mother smiled and dabbed at her eyes with a bit of cloth; the face at the window relaxed in a crooked smile and the watcher withdrew a pace to rub briskly at his eyes with two sinewy hands.

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The child presently climbed into a big armchair to admire the watch at leisure, Gene hitched his chair quite close to the little widow.

"I got sometheeng to say tonight eef you lak for listen," he said easily.

The little widow's glance met Gene's for the briefest second, then dropped again to her work, but she did not speak. Gene fished earnestly in a side coat pocket and presently extended his open hand toward the little widow. It held five little empty automatic pistol shells. The woman's hand flew to her mouth; the work slipped unheeded to the floor and she stared at Gene with bewildered, frightened eyes.

"Don' be scare'," said Gene softly; "everytheeng ees all right! I lak for tell you one leetle story. Quite leetle tam ago one ver' bad man she ees get killed—not so far away—and two mans ees look aroun' for see who ees do thees theeng. One mans ees ver' sharp for fin' thees party. Other man's she ees not so sharp—she ees theenk thees party maybe got ver' good right for kill. One thees mans she ees go down below to look aroun' close by where thees body ees found. Other mans she ees go on top side, close by one ver' beeg rock, and right away she ees fin' sometheeng. What you theenk she ees fin'?"

Then Gene rose and stood smiling down at the woman.

Still the little widow did not speak, but sat dazedly looking up at Gene, who continued to hold the shells where the woman could see them. Gene waited a moment, then went on:

"I will tell you what she ees fin'; she ees fin' thees leetle shells. She ees fin' more, too. She ees fin' prettiest leetle track een the world! She ees look ver' close on thees leetle track, then she ees put one beeg foot down, ver' heavy. She ees lift up thees beeg foot, and behold! Thees leetle track she ees vanish. She ees go up thees hill, leetle way, and every tam thees beeg foot come down, one leetle track she ees vanish. By an' by she ees come by one beeg piece gravel. She ees look on thees gravel, ver' sharp, but there ees no more track. She ees look aroun' leetle, and she ees see one more row of track. She ees follow thees track back to beeg rock, and now there ees no more leetle track. She look aroun', and there ees no more leetle track any place. By an' by she ees go down where thees other man—ees look for sign, and thees other mans ees say, 'what you find up there, Gene,' and Gene ees say, 'not one —— theeng, Black Jack, the ground she ees smooth lak water een a well!' What you theenk on thees story?"

The little widow had been looking steadily at Gene while he spoke, and her face lighted with pleasure as she came slowly to understand all that it meant. The face at the window changed greatly, too, but it changed to a black and furious scowl, and the watcher stepped back a pace to dash a palm savagely against his brow.

"Oh, the sneak!" he grated between tight clenched teeth. "The —— two-faced curl I'll kill him like a dog!"

He drew his gun with incredible speed and swung it swiftly upon its mark—the man standing helpless and unaware, so close that he might almost have touched him with the gun. Another tenth of a second—but Black Jack suddenly changed his mind and lowered the gun. Then, with the gun clutched in his right hand, and his left hand held tightly over his mouth as if to stifle the hot words that struggled to escape, he listened and watched again.

The little widow was standing now with her hands clasped to her bosom, staring at Gene.

"Oh, Gene!" she exclaimed abruptly. "I am so frightened! You knew all the time!"

"Sure, I know," replied Gene. "I keep thees story to myself long tam now—I keep eet t'ousan' year more!"

"You wouldn't. No, no! Forgive me, Gene! I've wronged you in my thoughts, sometimes; but I know now. You could not betray me!"

"No," returned Gene, "I am your frien'. I came for help you. I always help you, no matter what ees come. But I lak for know how eet ees. I lak for know thees story—how eet ees all happen."

"I am sure it will be best to tell it all, Gene," said the little widow, looking straight into Gene's eyes steadily without flinching. "You will understand then, and it will be a relief to tell it—to you."

The little widow told her story earnestly, and for the most part calmly; but there were times when the pent-up emotions of many months burst forth in a flood of touching eloquence, and Gene stood before

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her spellbound by the grace of her gestures and the sheer dramatic quality of the recital.

"It is true," she began. "I killed him! I do not know how I got my courage up to do it. I had gone there many times before, fully resolved to kill, but somehow, when he came past—so close always I couldn't do it. He was always drunk; always roaring a terrible song; it seemed awful—I couldn't do it! But at last the time came—I did it—God forgive me! I killed him!"

The woman caught her breath in a deep sigh that was almost a sob, then steadied herself, with an effort, and went on more calmly:

"We were so happy, Dan and I. We had but little and life seemed hard, sometimes; but we had the power-site, and our hopes ran high. Then suddenly the mine shut down and it was a hard struggle just to live. Dan bought some cows and fenced the place, and that brought on the trouble with Dave Hedges. Dan offered to help move the sheep-bridge, but Hedges refused even to discuss such a thing. He swore that he had built the bridge, that he always had used it, and that he would continue to use it—fence or no fence. Of course the land was ours and he had no right upon it, but he swore that he would tear it down as fast as Dan could build it, and would kill the very first man who got in his way.

"Only a short while after that he tore the fence down, and, when Dan tried to stop him, drove him away with his gun. Dan was not armed at the time, and so came back home after his gun. I tried to stop him—begged and pleaded with him not to go—but he was angry and would not listen. He took his automatic pistol and slipped up close to Hedges, then stepped from behind a tree to face him. Hedges drew his gun, but Dan was too quick for him and fired first. The bullet knocked Hedges' gun from his hand, then glanced and lodged in his hip. The wound was not severe, but it infuriated Hedges. He swore dreadfully; Dan just laughed until he subsided, then took away all of his cartridges and gave him back his gun and sent him home.

"After that I worried whenever Dan was out of my sight. I expected trouble every day. But nothing happened until one day, late in the Fall, when Dan failed to come home for his dinner. He was out getting the Winter's wood and I knew where he was working, so I started off through the woods to see what was keeping him. I was frightened, now, and ran as fast as I could. There were great piles of cord-wood all around and I did not know just where to look, so I ran here and there until I was all out of breath. At last I found him—a great tree had fallen across his body and crushed out his life!

"It seemed like a living thing—this tree. A cruel, hideous monster lying there, savagely pinning its victim to the ground! Oh, I can not tell you, Gene! I must have been in a frenzy. I tugged at his body for awhile, then I tugged and pulled at the tree until I could scarcely stand alone. I struck the cruel thing with my clenched fists, and screamed, and struck and screamed and struck again until my hands were all bruised and bleeding. I realized my folly, after a time, and ran to the barn; then, some way—I don't know how—I got on a horse and down to the Landers' place. I told them what had happened, then I fainted and they put me to bed. I got up again, though, and went with Smith and his brother Fred, and they sawed the tree in two and rolled away the log. Oh, my friend! It was dreadful! Everything went black, then, and the next thing I remember—I was sitting in a rocking-chair, with Smith and Fred standing before me.

" 'You fainted,' Smith said in his blunt way. 'We had to carry you in. And now, if you're all right, I reckon we'd better go back and bring Dan's body.'

"I told them to hurry, and they went right away, and after a while they carried Dan's poor body in and put it on the bed. I followed them into the bedroom, and—Oh! I don't know what I did, Gene! I only know that Smith dragged me screaming from the room and forced me into a chair.

" 'Your husband was murdered, Mrs. Reed,' he said, scowling down at me with his hand on his gun. 'He was shot through the heart before the tree dropped. We found the bullet holes in the body, and in his shirt, in front and behind. We saw some tracks down there, too. Dave Hedges done it, but we can't prove it on him—and I'm going to kill him—first time I see him. If I hang for it!'

"I lost my head then, and sprang to my feet and grasped Smith by the arms. 'No, no!' I screamed, 'don't do it, Smith, I want to kill the beast myself!'

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" 'That's the stuff, little woman,' he said, 'and I'll fix it so you can do it!'

"It was growing dark now, so Fred went to notify the neighbors and Smith stayed to keep me company until some of the women came.

"I thought of the baby then, and rushed away to the room where I had left her asleep. I found her lying on the floor. Evidently she had waked up and tumbled from the bed, and later on had cried herself to sleep again. She waked as I picked her up, and asked for her papa, and I had to lie to the poor little thing—then many times after. Some of the neighbors came after a time, and somehow I got through the night. Early next morning Smith Landers took me down to the wood-piles and showed me the tracks he had spoken about. He showed me where a horse had been tied some distance from where we had found Dan's body; and he thought the horse belonged to Hedges, but wasn't sure. A man's track led away from where the horse had been tied, and toward the wood-pile. The ground was soft and wet, and the tracks showed plainly where he dodged along from tree to tree until he came near the place where Dan was working. From here the tracks ran in a straight line to where I had found Dan's body. Smith took me to the stump the tree had fallen from and showed me the saw-marks across the top. It was plain, when Smith pointed it out, that the tree had been sawed nearly off by a skilful workman, and that the last three or four inches had been sawed by another and very clumsy hand.

" 'You see how it was?' Smith said. 'The old —— stood behind that stump over there and waited till Dan had the tree nearly sawed off, then he shot him. Then he dragged the body around where the tree would fall on it, and finished sawing it off.'

"From that moment I believed that Dave Hedges murdered my husband. He had no other enemy; no one else had a motive. We had no real evidence, however—nothing at all that could possibly stand in court; nor could the sheriff discover anything when he presently came to investigate, so we were helpless as far as bringing the crime home to Hedges was concerned.

"It was a sad time for me, Gene, after we had buried Dan, and I returned to this dreary old house alone. Of course I had the baby, and she was a great comfort—and there was Bruce, the faithful old collie; but I missed Dan terribly. What little money I had was soon gone, so I sold the team and lived for a long time on that money; then I sold the cows, one by one, until only one was left.

"Smith Landers was the only real friend I had, and he helped me all he could. He brought a team and hauled up the wood and cut it for me, and hunted the cows many times when Hedges cut the fence and let them out. Hedges cut the fence again and again, but I fixed it each time as best I could, and kept out of his way.

"There were times when I thought I could not endure it another day, but I had no relatives that I could appeal to, and the thought of going out into the world with the baby, appalled me, so I stayed on and managed to live—somehow. And all the time Dan's blood seemed to cry out to me for justice. It was a fearful thing, and I—It was the beast in me, I suppose, but it was there, whatever it was, and I could not drive it away. And living alone, and brooding—in spite of myself—it became in time a dreadful thing. I prayed for guidance and peace of mind, but it would not come, and at last I made up my mind to settle the score myself—let come what would. So I took the rifle and went to that place, many times, but always when he came past—so close—my heart would fail me, and the time came when I gave it up and put the gun away.

"Then one day he took me by surprize, when I was fixing the fence. I was frightened—he looked so coarse and brutal—and he grinned hideously as he rode up. He started to say something, but old Bruce came along just then and distracted his attention. The dog had been in the water, and he shook himself near the horse, and the horse shied and almost threw Hedges off. He cursed frightfully, then drew his gun and shot the dog dead in his tracks. Then he turned on me and called me every vile name he could think of, while he shook the pistol in my face. I was too badly frightened to move at first, but after a moment I turned and ran as fast as I could. I do not think he really tried to hit me, but he fired his pistol again and again until I was out of his sight in the brush.

"When I was sure that Hedges would be gone, I took the shovel and buried poor old Bruce. And as I worked, the knowledge

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came to me that the time had come; that I would kill this man if I could. This happened in the forenoon, and along about one o'clock Smith Landers came to the house. He didn't knock—just swung the door back a few inches and stood with his face in the opening.

" 'He's coming back,' he said. 'He'll be goin' down the trail in about twenty minutes. I saw him kill your dog, and now's the time to get him!'

"He said this as fast as he could speak, then turned and ran away through the woods. I did not know what to make of it—he was queer, you know—but I knew what I would do. I took Dan's automatic this time—I don't know why—I had always taken the rifle before. I had no time to spare, but luckily the baby was asleep, so I changed my shoes and picked up the pistol and went quickly to the big rock.

"I hid behind the big rock and made sure that the pistol was ready, and a moment later I heard Hedges coming. I waited until he came even with the rock, then—I don't know why I did it, but instead of shooting from behind the rock as I had planned, I stepped right out and faced him in the open. His horse shied as I stepped from behind the rock, and Hedges' hand flew to his gun.

" 'So-o-o,' he said, mockingly, half-drawing his gun, 'you're go'n'ta shoot me, hey? With that little pop gun? You make me laugh! Well, little sweetness, I've been a-pinin' for a long time to ketch you with a gun in your hand, and now at last I've got you! I sent your skunk of a husband to ——, and now I'm go'n'ta send you to join him!'

"I had plenty of time to shoot, while he said this; but I didn't, I just stood staring, half-hypnotized, until he drew his gun. We were both raising our guns at the same instant—then a shot rang out from below the trail. The bullet must have struck the horse, for he began to plunge in a frightful way. That shot saved my life, I think, for Hedges' first shot missed me. Then I began to shoot. I never had handled a pistol, so I held the gun as I had been taught to hold a rifle—in both hands. The barrel was so short that I had my thumb across the muzzle, and the first shot tore it nearly off. I knew what had happened, but I felt no pain at the moment, and kept right on pulling the trigger. Heaven must have directed the bullets, for I can not remember taking aim at all. Hedges fired again and again, but his horse was still rearing and turning about, and he missed me every time. At last he dropped his gun and clutched the saddle-horn with both hands, and the horse whirled around to gallop madly down the trail. I fired once more, then tried again, but the pistol snapped, and I knew it was empty. The horse made perhaps a dozen leaps along the trail, then the man leaned far over and pitched from the saddle.

"I stood staring at the body, as it tumbled down the steep hillside, then I noticed the blood pouring from my thumb. I managed to get a string from one of my shoes, and to tie it tight around my thumb; then I picked up the pistol and ran as fast as I could to the house.

"The baby was still asleep when I got to the house; I picked her up and kissed her awake. I was hysterical, walking about, mumbling to myself, clutching the baby to my bosom, ready to scream when Smith Landers came a few minutes later. He had Hedges' six-shooter and his belt, heavy with cartridges.

" 'I brought you these,' he said, and his face was transformed with pleasure and exultation. 'I knew you would want 'em, so I brought 'em along right away.'

"Whatever possessed him to think that I would want them, I couldn't at first imagine, but later on I understood. He thought I would like to have them for keepsakes, and I couldn't make him understand that they were the last things on earth I would want to have about me. I begged him to take them away, but he would not; and at last he went away and left them lying on the floor.

"I must have been out of my senses, for I built a fire in the range and put the gun on top of it, then stuffed the belt in—cartridges and all—and put the stove-lids back in place. The cartridges began to explode almost at once; the stove lids were blown off and the burning wood was scattered all over the room. I almost fainted, but when the floor caught fire I came to my senses and put it out with water from the tank.

"I had left the baby in the dining-room and closed the door behind me; I could hear her screaming; the cartridges were still exploding; I stood there with the bucket in my hand, half-paralyzed with fright—then

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the door swung open and the man called Vanderbilt walked in. He had a rifle in his hand; I was too badly scared even to scream. I knew him quite well—he often had stopped here for a drink and a little chat, and there were times when he seemed as sensible as any one. He took off his hat and bowed, then glanced around at the wreck; and I was somewhat reassured, for I never had seen him when he looked so live and bright.

"'I beg your pardon, madam,' he said after a moment. 'I heard the racket—it sounded like a gun-fight, so I just came in to see what was the trouble. My name is Vanderbilt—or—yes Vanderbilt. I think that is right. I was looking for this Hedgehog, myself, but you beat me to it. I have been a little—er—not quite at myself—at times—you know. I intended to kill him—I saw you—there—and followed you home.'

"He set his rifle down then, and walked over to glance into the stove. 'I'll take care of these trinkets,' he said, 'you clean this place up as quick as you can. Keep your mouth shut, and you'll get out of this scrape all right. Don't worry about this stuff. I'll take care of it. You go and look after that baby.'

"I ran to Daisy then, and when I went back, perhaps ten minutes later, the man had disappeared. He had taken the gun and belt, and when I cleaned up later on I failed to find even one of the bullets or split shells. I hope some day to have a chance to thank him."

"You geet chance, all right," said Gene, "thees paper she ees say ol' man ees all right, now. Thees doctairs she ees feex heem up fine, and pretty soon she ees come out from thees hospital place."

"I am glad to hear that," returned the woman, "and I must see him when he is fully recovered."

The little widow mused for a moment, then caught again the thread of her story.

"After Smith Landers was arrested—that was the worst time of all. Of course, if they convicted him I should have to confess—to let the boy suffer for a thing I had done was unthinkable, and I was terrified at the prospect. I pictured the poor boy in jail with that terrible sheriff trying to wring the truth from his wretched soul, and I could scarcely eat or sleep. I expected the sheriff to come for me, and kept watch on the road, for I knew that Smith had seen it all and I felt sure they would torture the truth from him in the end. But he steadfastly refused to tell, and at last they gave it up and set him free.

"He came to me right away and told me all about it. He told of the constant questioning, of days and nights in a dark cell without even a drink of water. They even strapped him to a bed and tickled the soles of his feet with a feather, and nearly drove him crazy! But he would not tell, and he brought his secret proudly home with him, and has it yet, God bless him! And best of all he's getting well. He sat up this morning and seemed strong; I—I couldn't face what I saw in his eyes, Gene, so I came home."

"Thees boy," said Gene when the woman paused. "She ees fire jus' one shot. That ees look ver' queer to me."

"It was queer," returned the woman, "and hard for a normal person to understand. He went to that place and hid behind a stump, but he did not try to shoot Hedges; he shot the horse to make him plunge and give me a chance to kill, because he thought I had the better right. And it is lucky that he was there, otherwise Hedges would surely have killed me!"

The woman paused; Gene glanced at the shells in his hand, then slipped them into his pocket.

"She ees one ver' foolish leetle lady for worry so much," he said. "No jury een West ever fin' you guilty. They set you free een five minute. Gene ees know that ver' well, but he no lak for see thees lady een jail to wait for trial, so he ees lock up hees tongue. Sure, no jury fin' you guilty!"

"Perhaps not," returned the woman. "No doubt you are right; but I was too much excited to realize that. I could only think of the jail, you know."

"You no skeer that thees Vanderbilt talk too much?"

"Yes, I was afraid of that, but most of all I feared Black Jack Rogers. He looked so fierce—his eyes were so keen—I feared him and could scarcely force myself to face him!"

"Black Jack ees raise —— eef he fin' out 'bout thees!" said Gene seriously. "Hees mind ees crooked, jus' now, but hees heart ees een right place, too. By an' by, when right tam ees come, Gene ees tell heem all 'bout eet. Jus' leetle tam, that ees all, then Black Jack she ees see everytheeng

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straight. She ees fierce mans, lak you say, but she do what she theenk ees right, all tam. By ——! Jus' wait; jus' geev leetle tam; when she ees get straight een hees mind, Black Jack come to leetle lady on hees knees. You see, sometam!"

"I hope so," said the little widow earnestly. "Not on his knees, of course; but it would be rather nice, I think, to have a man like him for a real friend. He wouldn't falter at the first ditch, I am sure of that."

"No," returned Gene, "no matter what ees come, Black Jack be there at the feenish!"

Gene turned to the child now fast asleep in the chair with watch clasped tight in her chubby hands.

"She ees one pretty picture," he said, then turned to look steadfastly at the little widow. "I lak for look on thees picture for long tam," he went on earnestly. "I lak for help take care thees child, always. I lak for take care thees mother too. I lak for take you 'way from thees place where there ees been so much trouble, and go to where the grass she ees all tam green and the bird she ees sing sweet song in tree. I lak for try to make you happy again, so be you maybe sing leetle song too sometam."

Then Gene held out his hands and the little widow crept into his arms.

The watcher at the window stepped cautiously back a few paces, then turned and ran swiftly to his horse.

"By——!" he swore huskily. "I've got her dead to rights at last! She lied! She waylaid Dave and shot him down from behind that rock—he shot in self-defense. It's murder any way you look at it. I don't dare go near them myself—no tellin' what I'd do. I'll notify the sheriff. I get the reward, and Frenchy goes to jail. He knew, all the time—he played me for a sucker—and I was!"

Black Jack untied the horse and grasped the saddle-horn as if to mount, then hesitated and turned around and stood facing the house. Very slowly the tension seemed to go out of him, and after a time he bowed his head and hid his face upon his arm, lying across the saddle. He stood thus for some minutes, occasionally muttering to himself, then suddenly straightened up and spoke aloud.

"It's ——!" he said, gritting his teeth. "Just plain ——! But I can't do it! There's some things a man can't do. By ——! I can't do it!"

He tied his horse again and went slowly, hesitating often, back to the window. When he glanced through the vine again Gene was sitting in a rocker with the sleeping child in his arms. The mother knelt on the floor, one hand in Gene's, the other caressing the child's soft curls. The watcher stared for a long time at the lovely scene, spellbound, fascinated, unable to tear his glance away. Never in all his hard life had he witnessed a thing like this; the man was shaken to the very depths of his soul and the vine rustled in his trembling hand. He released the vine then, and turned away and walked slowly back to his horse.

Very slowly Black Jack rode home that night, both hands on the saddle-horn, his head bowed in deep thought. The men were all asleep when he came at last to the house. He tossed his hat on the table, then pulled a chair to the grate and stared for a long time at the slowly dying fire; and as he gazed his life unreeled before him like pictures on a screen. Strangely clear his memory seemed tonight, as the pictures came before him one by one. One by one they came—pleasant scenes of boyhood days and later ones of strife and blood, and at last the homelike scene of gentleness and love he had looked upon this night. Many times this last picture came before him, and he shuddered when he thought of the gun pointing through the window, and his finger touching the trigger to snuff out the life of his friend.

At last he rose and stood for a moment, rubbing his eyes and running his fingers through his hair, then made his way to the little cupboard where he kept his extra gun. He opened the tiny door and secured the gun, then passed outside and walked slowly a little way to the river-bank and stood looking down at the tumbling water. He caressed the gun, thoughtfully spinning the cylinder round and round for a time, then threw back his head to gaze at the silent beauty of the stars and the moon riding serenely along through the scattered clouds.

To Gene, who had just now put up his horse and was passing on to the house, the old fighter seemed an heroic figure, standing there on the river-bank with his head thrown back and the night wind tossing his hair. Then as he came closer he saw

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the gun in Black Jack's hand. The gun and Black Jack's attitude alarmed him, and he quickened his pace.

Then, when he had come quite close, Gene saw a strange thing. And, little though Gene realized it, what he saw was an allegorical picture representing the passing of the wild but glorious Old West!

He saw Black Jack suddenly stiffen and toss the gun far out on the moonlit water. The other gun followed, then the belt, then Black Jack turned and the two stalwart, brawny men stood face to face.

"What thees all ees mean, Black Jack?" Gene demanded shortly.

"It means," replied Black Jack tensely, "that I am through with guns—and everything that goes with them. I found out, tonight—I came within a hair's breath—Man, I'm not fit to handle a gun; I'll never touch another as long as I live! You've been right, Gene, all the time, and I've been wrong. Dave Hedges was a beast, and by rights he ought to have been killed long ago. And I've been a beast all of my life. I learned something tonight, Gene—I was there at the Reed place, all the time. I saw everything—heard everything. She's the bravest little woman in the world, Gene, and you'll be happy with her. I know it! I want to be her friend—and yours."

Black Jack put out his hand, and as Gene grasped it in a mighty grip he said:

"And by ——! Black Jack, we lak for be your frien', too!"

THE GREAT "GOLD BLUFFS" HOAX

by Eugene Cunningham

TO SAN FRANCISCO in January, 1851, came a tale that set even its excitement-jaded pulses athrob. Briefly, nineteen prospectors had proceeded in the steamer *Chesapeake* toward the Klamath River, and near this stream the seashore for miles was composed—half, at least—of pure gold. The original nineteen could not resolve to do anything but gloat. A man could carry away no more than a hundred pounds of metal, and who would leave the golden treasury with such a pittance?

The newspapers went wild. The *Alta California* said:

> Gold is mixed with black sand in proportions of from ten cents to ten dollars a pound. At times, when the surf is high, the gold is not easily discovered, but after a succession of calms the entire beach is covered with gold! Mr. Collins, secretary of the Pacific Mining Company, measured a patch of gold and sand and estimates it will yield each member of the company $43,000,000. This estimate is formed upon a calculation that the sand holds out to one-tenth as rich as observation warrants supposing!

Digging was not required. One had only to raise as much as he wished of the golden sand from the beach. Small wonder that San Franciscans went mad! General Wilson and Mr. Collins, original discoverers, testified to the truth of the accounts. The Pacific Mining Company—organized for the occasion—saw its stock reach incredible values. Again the *Alta California* speaks—

> Mr. Collins saw a man (one of the original nineteen) who had accumulated fifty thousand pounds, or fifty thousand tons—he did not recall which—of the richest kind of black sand!

Eight vessels prepared to sail for "Gold Bluffs." No other words were heard in San Francisco. They were the "Open Sesame" of *Ali Baba*, the password of Midas. "Gold Bluffs" filled columns of the newspapers, covered huge posters at street-corners, were in every man's mouth by day and his dreams by night.

The news spread to foreign countries and threatened to precipitate a second, huger, gold-rush—until the next mail. The Pacific Mining Company sank thousands in operating steamers. Multitudes bought stock. Then the bottom dropped out.

It was rumored first that the gold was mixed with black and gray sands; that because of its exceeding fineness it could not be separated from the sand. Worse still, the sea washed through huge piles of collected sand and flood-tide brought none of it back. Working "Gold Bluffs" promised a reversal of ordinary mining—gold went into, instead of coming out of, the ground. So the greatest excitement of the decade was done. But it was a "thriller" while it lasted!

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SIR JUDAS

by RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "The Sea Hawk," "The Night of Escape," etc.

IN THIS short story, complete in itself, taken from the series which the author has been pleased to call "The Historical Nights' Entertainment," an attempt has been made to draw a group of more or less famous events using the fiction form, but without amplifying it by imagination.

Each incident here pictured is an actual historic happening; the dialogue is such as was chronicled at the time, added to by the paraphrases of contemporary chroniclers; the settings are authentic.

A hard task, this, the author has set himself, but his labor was lightened by being able to choose the most vivid and bizarre "nights" in all countries and all periods of history. How greatly he has succeeded is for the reader to judge.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

SIR WALTER was met on landing at Plymouth from his ill-starred voyage to El Dorado by Sir Lewis Stukeley, which was but natural, seeing that Sir Lewis was not only Vice-Admiral of Devon, but also Sir Walter's very good friend and kinsman.

If Sir Walter doubted whether it was in his quality as kinsman or as vice-admiral that Sir Lewis met him, the cordiality of the latter's embrace and the noble entertainment following at the house of Sir Christopher Hare, near the port, whither Sir Lewis conducted him, set this doubt at rest and relighted the lamp of hope in the despairing soul of an adventurer. In Sir Lewis he saw only his kinsman—his very good friend and kinsman, to insist upon Stukeley's own description of himself—at a time when of all others in his crowded life he needed the support of a kinsman and the guidance of a friend.

You know the story of this Sir Walter, who had been one of the brightest ornaments of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and might have added luster to that of King James, had not his Sowship—to employ the title bestowed upon that prince by his own queen—been too mean of soul to appreciate the man's great worth. Courtier, philosopher, soldier, man of letters and man of action alike, Raleigh was at once the greatest prose writer, and one of the greatest captains of his age, the last survivor of that glorious company—whose other members are Drake and Frobisher and Hawkins—that had given England supremacy upon the seas, that had broken the power and lowered the pride of Spain.

His was a name that had resounded, to the honor and glory of England, throughout the world, a name that, like Drake's, was a thing of hate and terror to King Philip and his Spaniards; yet the King of Scots, unclean of body and of mind, who had succeeded to the throne of Elizabeth, must affect ignorance of that great name which shall never die while England lives.

When the splendid courtier stood before him—for at fifty Sir Walter was still handsome of person and magnificent of apparel—James looked him over and inquired who he might be. When they had told him—

"I've rawly heard of thee," quoth the

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royal punster, who sought by such atrocities of speech to be acclaimed a wit.

It was ominous of what must follow, and soon thereafter you see this great and gallant gentleman arrested on a trumped-up charge of high treason, bullied, vituperated, and insulted by venal, peddling lawyers, and, finally, although his wit and sincerity had shattered every fragment of evidence brought against him, sentenced to death. Thus far James went; but he hesitated to go further, hesitated to carry out the sentence. Sir Walter had too many friends in England then; the memory of his glorious deeds was still too fresh in the public mind, and execution might have been attended by serious consequences to King James. Besides, one at least of the main objects was achieved. Sir Walter's broad acres were confiscated by virtue of that sentence, and King James wanted the land—filched thus from one who was England's pride—to bestow it upon one of those golden calves of his who were England's shame.

"I maun hae the land for Carr. I maun hae it," was his brazen and peevish answer to an appeal against the confiscation.

For thirteen years Sir Walter lay in the Tower, under the sentence passed in 1603, enjoying after a season a certain liberty, visited there by his dear lady and his friends, among whom was Henry, Prince of Wales, who did not hesitate to publish that no man but his father—whom he detested—would keep such a bird in a cage. He beguiled the time in literary and scientific pursuits, distilling his essences and writing that stupendous work of his, "The History of the World." Thus old age crept upon him; but far from quenching the fires of enterprise within his adventurer's soul, it brought a restlessness that urged him at last to make a bid for liberty. Despairing of winning it from the clemency of James, he applied his wits to extracting it from the king's cupidity.

Throughout his life, since the day when first he had brought himself to the notice of a queen by making of his cloak a carpet for her feet, he had retained side by side with the dignity of the sage and the greatness of the hero, the craft and opportunism of the adventurer. His opportunity now was the straitened condition of the royal treasury, a hint of which had been let fall by Winwood, the Secretary of State. He announced at once that he knew of a gold-mine in Guiana, the El Dorado of the Spaniards.

On his return from a voyage to Guiana in 1595, he had written of it thus:

> There the common soldier shall fight for gold instead of pence, pay himself with plates half a foot broad, whereas he breaks his bones in other wars for provant and penury. Those commanders and chieftains that shoot at honor and abundance shall find here more rich and beautiful cities, more temples adorned with golden images, more sepulchers filled with treasure than either Cortez found in Mexico or Pizarro in Peru.

Winwood now reminded him that as a consequence many expeditions had gone out, but failed to discover any of these things.

"That," said Raleigh, "is because those adventurers were ignorant alike of the country and of the art of conciliating its inhabitants. Were I permitted to go, I would make Guiana to England what Peru has been to Spain."

That statement reported to James in his need, was enough to fire his cupidity, and when Raleigh further added that he would guarantee the Crown one-fifth of the treasure without asking any contribution toward the adventure either in money or in ships, he was permitted to come forth and prepare for the expedition.

His friends came to his assistance, and in March of 1617 he set sail for El Dorado with a well-manned and well-equipped fleet of fourteen ships, the Earls of Arundel and Pembroke standing sureties for his return.

From the outset the fates were unpropitious. Disaster closed the adventure. Gondomar, the Ambassador of Spain at Whitehall, too well informed of what was afoot, had warned his master. Spanish ships waited to frustrate Sir Walter, who was under pledge to avoid all conflict with the forces of King Philip. But conflict there was, and bloodshed in plenty, about the city of Manoa, which the Spaniards held as the key to the country into which the English adventurers sought to penetrate. Among the slain were the Governor of Manoa, who was Gondomar's own brother, and Sir Walter's eldest son.

To Raleigh, waiting at the mouth of the Orinoco, came his beaten forces in retreat, with the terrible news of a happening that meant his ruin. Half-maddened, his anguish increased by the loss of his boy, he upbraided them so fiercely that Keymis, who had been in charge of the expedition,

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shut himself up in his cabin, and shot himself with a pocket pistol. Mutiny followed, and Whitney—most trusted of Sir Walter's captains—set sail for England, being followed by six other ships of that fleet, which meanwhile had been reduced to twelve. With the remaining five the stricken Sir Walter had followed more at leisure. What need to hurry! Disgrace, and perhaps death awaited him in England. He knew the power of Spain with James, who was so set upon a Spanish marriage for his heir, knew Spain's hatred of himself, and what eloquence it would gather in the mouth of Gondomar, intent upon avenging his brother's death.

He feared the worst, and so was glad upon landing to have by him a kinsman upon whom he could lean for counsel and guidance in this darkest hour of all his life. Sitting late that night in the library of Sir Christopher Hare's house, Sir Walter told his cousin in detail the story of his misadventure, and confessed to his misgivings.

"My brains are broken," was his cry.

Stukeley combed his beard in thought. He had little comfort to offer.

"It was not expected," said he, "that you would return."

"Not expected?"

Sir Walter's bowed white head was suddenly flung back. Indignation blazed in the eyes that age had left undimmed.

"What act in all my life justified that I should be false to honor? My danger here was made quite plain, and Captain King would have had me steer a course for France, where I had found a welcome and a harbor. But to consent I must have been false to my lords of Arundel and Pembroke, who were sureties to the king for my return. Life is still sweet to me despite my three-score years and more, but honor is sweeter still."

And then, because life was sweet, he bluntly asked his cousin—

"What is the king's intent by me?"

"Nay, now," said Stukeley, "who shall know what passes in the king's mind? From the signs, I judge your case to be none so desperate. You have good friends in plenty, among whom, although the poorest, count myself the first. Anon, when you are rested, we'll to London by easy stages, baiting at the houses of your friends, and enlisting their good offices in your behalf."

Raleigh took counsel on the matter with Captain King, a bluff, tawny-bearded seaman, who was devoted to him body and soul.

"Sir Lewis proposes it, eh?" quoth the hardy seaman. "And Sir Lewis is Vice-Admiral of Devon? He is not by chance bidden to escort you to London?"

The captain, clearly, had escaped the spell of Stukeley's affability. Sir Walter was indignant. He had never held his kinsman in great esteem, and had never been on the best of terms with him in the past. Nevertheless he was very far from suspecting him of what King implied. To convince him that he did Sir Lewis an injustice Raleigh put the blunt question to his kinsman in King's presence.

"Nay," said Sir Lewis, "I am not yet bidden to escort you. But as Vice-Admiral of Devon I may at any moment be so bidden. It were wiser, I hold, not to await such an order. Though even if it come," he made haste to add, "you may still count upon my friendship. I am your kinsman first, your vice-admiral after."

With a smile that irradiated his handsome, virile countenance, Sir Walter held out his hand to clasp his cousin's in token of appreciation. Captain King expressed no opinion save what might be conveyed in a grunt and a shrug.

Guided now unreservedly by his cousin's counsel, Sir Walter set out with him upon that journey to London. Captain King went with them, as well as Sir Walter's body-servant, Cotterell, and a Frenchman named Manourie, who had made his first appearance in the Plymouth household on the previous day. Stukeley explained the fellow as a gifted man of medicine, whom he had sent for to cure him of a trivial but inconvenient ailment by which he was afflicted.

Journeying by slow stages, as Sir Lewis had directed, they came at last to Brentford. Sir Walter, had he followed his own bent, would have journeyed more slowly still, for in a measure, as he neared London, apprehensions of what might await him there grew darker. He spoke of them to King, and the blunt captain said nothing to dispel them.

"You are being led like a sheep to the shambles," he declared, "and you go like a sheep. You should have landed in France, where you have friends. Even now it is

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not too late. A ship could be procured——"

"And my honor could be sunk at sea," Sir Walter harshly concluded, in reproof of such counsel.

But at the inn at Brentford he was sought out by a visitor, who had brought him the like advice in rather different terms. This was De Chesne, the secretary of the French envoy, Le Clerc. Cordially welcomed by Raleigh, the Frenchman expressed his deep concern to see Sir Walter under arrest.

"You conclude too hastily," laughed Sir Walter.

"*Monsieur*, I do not conclude. I speak of what I am inform'."

"Misinformed, sir. I am not a prisoner —at least, not yet," he added, with a sigh. "I travel of my own free will to London with my good friend and kinsman Stukeley, to lay the account of my voyage before the king."

"Of your own free will? You travel of your own free will? And you are not a prisoner? Ha!" There was bitter mockery in De Chesne's short laugh "*C'est bien drôle!*" And he explained: "Milord, the Duke of Buckingham, he has write in his master's name to the Ambassador Gondomar that you are taken and held at the disposal of the King of Spain. Gondomar is to inform him whether King Philip wish that you be sent to Spain to essay the justice of his Catholic Majesty, or that you suffer here. Meanwhile your quarters are being made ready in the Tower. Yet you tell me you are not prisoner! You go of your own free will to London; Sir Walter, do not be deceive'. If you reach London, you are lost."

Now here was news to shatter Sir Walter's last illusion. Yet desperately he clung to the fragments of it. The envoy's secretary must be at fault.

" 'Tis yourself are at fault, Sir Walter, in that you trust those about you," the Frenchman insisted.

Sir Walter stared at him, frowning.

"D'ye mean Stukeley?" quoth he, half-indignant already at the mere suggestion.

"Sir Lewis, he is your kinsman," De Chesne shrugged. "You should know your family better than I. But who is this Manourie who accompanies you? Where is he come from? What you know of him?"

Sir Walter confessed that he knew nothing.

"But I know much. He is a fellow of evil reputation. A spy who does not scruple to sell his own people. And I know that letters of commission from the privy counsel for your arrest were give to him in London ten days ago. Whether those letters were to himself, or he was just the messenger to another, imports nothing. The fact is everything. The warrant against you exists, and it is in the hands of one or another of those that accompany you. I say no more. As I have tol' you, you should know your own family. But of this be sure, they mean that you go to the Tower, and so to your death. And now, Sir Walter, if I show you the disease I also bring you the remedy. I am command' by my master to offer you a French bark which is in the Thames, and a safe conduct to the Governor of Calais. In France you will find safety and honor, as your worth deserve'."

Up sprang Sir Walter from his chair, and flung off the cloak of thought in which he had been mantled.

"Impossible," he said. "Impossible! There is my plighted word to return, and there are my lords of Arundel and Pembroke, who are sureties for me. I can not leave them to suffer by my default."

"They will not suffer at all," De Chesne assured him. He was very well-informed. "King James has yielded to Spain partly because he fears, partly because he will have a Spanish marriage for Prince Charles, and will do nothing to trouble his good relations with King Philip. But, after all, you have friends, whom His Majesty also fears. If you escape' you would resolve all his perplexities. I do not believe that any obstacle will be offer' to your escape—else why they permit you to travel thus without any guard, and to retain your sword?"

Half-distracted as he was by what he had learned, yet Sir Walter clung stoutly and obstinately to what he believed to be the only course for a man of honor. And so he dismissed De Chesne with messages of gratitude but refusal to his master, and sent for Captain King. Together they considered all that the secretary had stated, and King agreed with De Chesne's implied opinion that it was Sir Lewis himself who held the warrant.

They sent for him at once, and Raleigh straightly taxed him with it. Sir Lewis as straightly admitted it, and when King

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thereupon charged him with deceit he showed no anger, but only the profoundest grief. He sank into a chair and took his head into his hands.

"What could I do? What could I do?" he cried. "The warrant came in the very moment we were setting out. At first I thought of telling you; and then I bethought me that to do so would be but to trouble your mind, without being able to offer you help."

Sir Walter understood what was implied.

"Did you not say," he asked, "that you were my kinsman first and Vice-Admiral of Devon after?"

"Aye— and so I am. Though I must lose my office of vice-admiral, which has cost me six hundred pounds, if I suffer you to escape, I'd never hesitate if it were not for Manourie, who watches me as closely as he watches you, and would balk us at the last. And that is why I have held my peace on the score of the warrant. What can it help that I should trouble you with the matter until at the same time I can offer you some way out?"

"The Frenchman has a throat, and throats can be slit," said the downright King.

"So they can; and men can be hanged for slitting them," returned Sir Lewis, and thereafter resumed and elaborated his first argument, using now such forceful logic and obvious sincerity that Sir Walter was convinced. He was no less convinced, too, of the peril in which he stood. He plied those wits of his, which had rarely failed him in an extremity. Manourie was the difficulty. But in his time he had known many of these agents who, without sentimental interest and purely for the sake of gold, were ready to play such parts; and never yet had he known one who was not to be corrupted. So that evening he desired Manourie's company in the room above stairs that had been set apart for Sir Walter's use. Facing him across the table at which both were seated, Sir Walter thrust his clenched fist upon the board, and suddenly opening it, dazzled the Frenchman's beady eyes with the jewel sparkling in his palm.

"Tell me, Manourie, are you paid as much as that to betray me?"

Manourie paled a little under his tan. He was a swarthy, sharp-featured fellow, slight and wiry. He looked into Sir Walter's grimly smiling eyes, then again at the white diamond, from which the candlelight was striking every color of the rainbow. He made a shrewd estimate of the price, and shook his black head. He had quite recovered from the shock of Sir Walter's question.

"Not half so much," he confessed with impudence.

"Then you might find it more remunerative to serve me," said the knight. "This jewel is to be earned."

The agent's eyes flickered; he passed his tongue over his lips.

"As how?" quoth he.

"Briefly this: I have but learnt of the trammel in which I am taken. I must have time to concert my measures of escape, and time is almost at an end. You are skilled in drugs, so my kinsman tells me. Can you so drug me as to deceive physicians that I am *in extremis?*"

Manourie considered awhile.

"I—I think I could," he answered presently.

"And keep faith with me in this, as the price of, say—two such stones?"

The venal knave gasped in amazement. This was not generosity; it was prodigality. He recovered again, and swore himself Sir Walter's.

"About it, then," Sir Walter rolled the gem across the board into the clutch of the spy, which pounced to meet it.

"Keep that in earnest. The other will follow when we have cozened them."

NEXT morning Sir Walter could not resume the journey. When Cotterell went to dress him he found his master taken with vomits, and reeling like a drunkard. The valet ran to fetch Sir Lewis, and when they returned together they found Sir Walter on all fours gnawing the rushes of the floor, his face livid and horribly distorted, his brow glistening with sweat.

Stukeley, in alarm, ordered Cotterell to get his master back to bed and to foment him, which was done. But on the next day there was no improvement, and on the third things were in far more serious case. The skin of his brow and breast was inflamed, and covered with horrible purple blotches—the result of an otherwise harmless ointment with which the French empiric had supplied him.

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When Stukeley beheld him thus disfigured, and lying apparently inert and but half-conscious upon his bed, he backed away in terror. The vice admiral had seen aforetime the horrible manifestations of the plague, and could not be mistaken here. He fled from the infected air of his kinsman's chamber, and summoned what physicians were available to pronounce and prescribe. The physicians came—three in number—but manifested no eagerness to approach the patient closely. The mere sight of him was enough to lead them to the decision that he was afflicted with the plague in a singularly virulent form.

Presently one of them plucked up courage so far as to feel the pulse of the apparently delirious patient. Its feebleness confirmed his diagnosis; moreover the hand he held was cold and turgid. He was not to know that Sir Walter had tightly wrapped about his upper arm the ribbon from his poniard, and so he was entirely deceived.

The physicians withdrew, and delivered their verdict, whereupon Sir Lewis at once sent word of it to the Privy Council.

That afternoon the faithful Captain King, sorely afflicted by the news, came to visit his master, and was introduced to Sir Walter's chamber by Manourie, who was in attendance upon him. To the seaman's amazement he found Sir Walter sitting up in bed, surveying in a hand-mirror a face that was horrible beyond description with the complacent smile of one who takes satisfaction in his appearance. Yet there was no fevered madness in the smiling eyes. They were alive with intelligence, amounting, indeed, to craft.

"Ah, King," was the glad welcome. "The prophet David did make himself a fool, and suffered spittle to fall upon his beard, to escape from the hands of his enemies. And there was Brutus, aye, and others as memorable who have descended to such artifice."

Though he laughed, it is clear that he was seeking to excuse an unworthiness of which he was conscious.

"Artifice?" quoth King aghast. "Is this artifice?"

"Aye—a hedge against my enemies, who will be afraid to approach me."

King sat himself down by his master's bed.

"A better hedge against your enemies, Sir Walter, would have been the strip of sea 'twixt here and France. Would to Heaven you had done as I advised ere you set foot in this ungrateful land."

"The omission may be repaired," said Sir Walter.

Before the imminence of his peril, as now disclosed to him, Sir Walter had been reconsidering De Chesne's assurance touching my Lords Arundel and Pembroke, and he had come to conclude—the more readily, perhaps, because it was as he would have it—that De Chesne was right; that to break faith with them was no great matter after all, nor one for which they would be called upon to suffer. And so, now, when it was all but too late, he yielded to the insistence of Captain King, and consented to save himself by flight to France.

King was to go about the business of procuring a ship without loss of time. Yet there was no need of desperate haste, as was shown when presently orders came to Prentford for the disposal of the prisoner. The king, who was at Salisbury, desired that Sir Walter should be conveyed to his own house in London. Stukeley reported this to him, proclaiming it a sign of royal favor. Sir Walter was not deceived. He knew the reason to be fear lest he should infect the Tower with the plague by which he was reported stricken.

So the journey was resumed, and Sir Walter was brought to London, and safely bestowed in his own house, but in the care of his loving friend and kinsman. Manourie's part being fulfilled and the aim accomplished, Sir Walter completed the promised payment by bestowing upon him the second diamond—a form of eminently portable currency with which the knight was well-supplied. On the morrow Manourie was gone, dismissed as a consequence of the part he had played.

It was Stukeley who told Sir Walter this—a very well-informed and injured Stukeley, who asked to know what he had done to forfeit the knight's confidence that behind his back Sir Walter secretly concerted means of escape. Had his cousin ceased to trust him?

Sir Walter wondered. Looking into that lean, crafty face, he considered King's unquenchable mistrust of the man, bethought him of his kinsman's general neediness, remembered past events that shed light upon his ways, and nature, and began now at last to have a sense of the man's hypocrisy

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and double-dealing. Yet he reasoned in regard to him precisely as he had reasoned in regard to Manourie. The fellow was acquisitive, and therefore corruptible. If indeed, he was so base that he had been bought to betray Sir Walter, then he could be bought again to betray those who had so bought him.

"Nay, nay," said Sir Walter easily. "It is not lack of trust in you, my good friend, but you are the holder of an office, and knowing as I do the upright honesty of your character, I feared to embarrass you with things whose very knowledge must give you the parlous choice of being false to that office or false to me."

Suddenly he broke forth into imprecations. He was, he vowed, the most accursed and miserable of men that such a task as this should have fallen to his lot. And he was a poor man, too, he would have his cousin remember. It was unthinkable that he should use the knowledge he had gained to attempt to frustrate Sir Walter's plan of escape to France. And this notwithstanding that if Sir Walter escaped, it is certain he would lose his office of vice-admiral and the six-hundred pounds he had paid for it.

"As to that, you shall be at no loss," Sir Walter assured him. "I could not suffer it. I pledge you my honor, Lewis, that you shall have a thousand pounds from my wife on the day that I am safely landed in France or Holland. Meanwhile, in earnest of what is to come, here is a toy of value for you."

And he presented Sir Lewis with a jewel of price, a great ruby encrusted in diamonds.

Thus reassured that he would be immune from pecuniary loss, Sir Lewis was ready to throw himself whole-heartedly into Sir Walter's plans, and to render him all possible assistance. True, this assistance was a costly matter; there was this person to be bought and that one; there were expenses here and expenses there, incurred by Sir Lewis on his kinsman's behalf; and there were odd presents, too, which Stukeley seemed to expect and which Sir Walter could not deny him. He had no illusions now that King had been right; that he was dealing with a rogue who could exact the uttermost farthing for his services, but he was gratified at the shrewdness with which he had taken his cousin's measure, and did not grudge the bribes by which he was to escape the scaffold.

De Chesne came again to the house in London, to renew his master's offer of a ship to carry Sir Walter overseas, and such other assistance as Sir Walter might require. But by now the knight's arrangements were complete. His servant Cotterell had come to inform him that his own boatswain, now in London, was the owner of a ketch, at present lying at Tilbury, admirably suited to the enterprise and entirely at Sir Walter's disposal. It had been decided, then, with the agreement of Captain King, that they should avail themselves of this; and accordingly Cotterell was bidden desire the boatswain to have the craft made ready for sea at once. In view of this, and anxious to avoid unnecessarily compromising the French envoy, Sir Walter gratefully declined the latter's offer.

AND so we come at last to that July evening appointed for the flight. Raleigh, who, having for some time discarded the use of Manourie's ointment, had practically recovered his normal appearance, covering his long white hair under a Spanish hat, and muffling the half of his face in the folds of a cloak, came to Wapping Stairs—that ill-omened place of execution of pirates and sea-rovers accompanied by Cotterell, who carried the knight's cloak bag, and by Sir Lewis and Sir Lewis' son. Out of solicitude for their dear friend and kinsman, the Stukeleys could not part from him until he was safely launched upon his voyage. At the head of the stairs they were met by Captain King; at the foot of them a boat was waiting, as concerted, the boatswain at the tiller.

King greeted them with an air of obvious relief.

"You feared perhaps we should not come," said Stukeley, with a sneer at the captain's avowed mistrust of him. "Yet now, I trust, you'll do me the justice to admit that I have shown myself an honest man."

The uncompromising King looked at him and frowned, misliking the words.

"I hope that you'll continue so," he answered stiffly.

They went down the slippery steps to the boat, and then the shore glided slowly past them as they pushed off into the stream of the ebbing tide.

A moment later, King, whose suspicious eyes kept a sharp lookout, observed another

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boat put off some two-hundred yards higher up the river. At first he saw it breast the stream as if proceeding toward London Bridge, then abruptly swing about and follow them. Instantly he drew the attention of Sir Walter to that pursuing wherry.

"What's this?" quoth Sir Walter harshly. "Are we betrayed?"

The watermen, taking fright at the words, hung now upon their oars.

"Put back," Sir Walter bade them. "I'll not betray my friends to no purpose. Put back, and let us home again."

"Nay, now," said Stukeley gravely, himself watching the wherry. "We are more than a match for them in oars, even if their purpose be such as you suspect—for which suspicion, when all is said, there is no ground. On then!"

He addressed himself to the watermen, whipping out a pistol, and growing truculent in mien and voice.

"To your oars! Row, you dogs, or I'll pistol you where you sit."

The men bent their backs forthwith, and the boat swept on. But Sir Walter was still full of apprehension, still questioning the wisdom of keeping to their down-stream course if they were being followed.

"But are we followed?" cried the impatient Sir Lewis. "'Sdeath, cousin, is not the river a highway for all the world to use, and must every wherry that chances to go our way be in pursuit of us? If you are to halt at every shadow, faith, you'll never accomplish anything. I vow I am unfortunate in having a friend whom I would save so full of doubts and fears."

Sir Walter gave him reason, and even King came to conclude that he suspected him unjustly, whilst the rowers, under Stukeley's suasion, now threw themselves heartily into their task, and onward sped the boat through the darkening night, taking but little account of that other wherry that hung ever in their wake. In this wise they came at length to Greenwich on the last of the ebb. But here finding the water beginning to grow against them, and wearied by the exertion into which Stukeley's enthusiasm had flogged them, the watermen paused again, declaring that they could not reach Gravesend before morning.

Followed a brief discussion at the end of which Sir Walter bade them put ashore at Purfleet.

"And that's the soundest counsel," quoth the boatswain. "For at Purfleet we can get horses on to Tilbury."

Stukeley was of the same opinion; but not so the more practical King.

"'Tis useless," he declared to them. "At this hour how shall you get horses to go by land?"

And now Sir Walter, looking over his shoulder, saw the other wherry bearing down upon them through the faintly opalescent mists of dawn. A hail came to them across the water.

"Oh, 'Sdeath! We are betrayed!" cried Raleigh bitterly, and Stukeley swore more fiercely still.

Sit Walter turned to him.

"Put ashore," he said shortly, "and let us home."

"Aye, perhaps 'twere best. For tonight there's an end to the enterprise, and if I am taken in your company now, what shall be said to me for this active assistance in your escape?"

His voice was gloomy, his face drawn and white.

"Could you not plead that you had but pretended to go with me to seize on my private papers?" suggested the ingenious mind of Raleigh.

"I could. But shall I be believed? Shall I?" His gloom was deepening to despair.

Raleigh was stricken almost with remorse on his cousin's account. His generous heart was now more concerned with the harm to his friends than with his own doom. He desired to make amends to Stukeley, but had no means save such as lay in the power of that currency he used. Having naught else to give, he must give that. He plunged his hand into an inner pocket, and brought forth a handful of jewels, which he thrust upon his kinsman.

"Courage," he urged him. "Up now, and we may yet win out and home, so that all will be well with you at least, and you shall not suffer for your friendship to me."

Stukeley embraced him then, protesting his love and desire to serve him.

They came to land at last, just below Greenwich Bridge, and almost at the same moment the other wherry grounded immediately above them. Men sprang from her, with the obvious intent of cutting off their retreat.

"Too late!" said Raleigh, and sighed, entirely without passion now that the dice had

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fallen and showed that the game was lost. "You must act on my suggestion to explain your presence, Lewis."

"Indeed, there is no other course," Sir Lewis agreed. "And you are in the same case, Captain King. You must confess that you joined with me but to betray Sir Walter. I'll bear you out. Thus, each supporting the other——"

"I'll roast in —— before I brand myself a traitor," roared the captain furiously. "And were you an honest man, Sir Lewis, you'd understand my meaning."

"So, so?" said Stukeley, in a quiet, wicked voice. And it was observed that his son and one or two of the watermen had taken their stand beside him as if in readiness for action. "Why, then, since you will have it so, captain, I arrest you, in the king's name, on the charge of abetting treason."

The captain fell back a step, stricken a moment by sheer amazement. Then he groped for a pistol to do at last what he realized he should have done long since. Instantly he was overpowered. It was only then that Sir Walter understood the thing that had happened, and with understanding came fury. The old adventurer flung back his cloak, and snatched at the rapier to put it through the vitals of his dear friend and kinsman. But he was too late. Hands seized upon him, and he found himself held by the man from the wherry, confronted by a Mr. William Herbert, whom he knew for Stukeley's cousin, and he heard Mr. Herbert formally asking him for the surrender of his sword.

Instantly he governed himself, repressed his fury. He looked coldly at his kinsman, whose face showed white and evil in the growing light of the early Summer dawn.

"Sir Lewis," was all he said, "these actions will not turn out to your credit."

He had no illusion left. His understanding was now a very full one. His dear friend and kinsman had played him false throughout, intending first to drain him of his resources before finally flinging the empty husk to the executioner. Manourie had been in the plot; he had run with the hare and hunted with the hounds; and Sir Walter's own servant Cotterell had done no less. Amongst them they had "cozened the great cozener"—to use Stukeley's own cynical expression. Even so, it was only on his trial that Sir Walter plumbed the full depth of Stukeley's baseness; for it was only then he learned that his kinsman had been armed by a warrant of immunity to assist his projects of escape, so that he might the more effectively incriminate and betray him; and Sir Walter discovered also that the ship in which he had landed, and other matters, were to provide additional Judas' fees to this acquisitive betrayer.

If to escape his enemies Sir Walter had had recourse to artifices unworthy the great hero he was, now that all hope was lost he conducted himself with dignity and cheerfulness beyond equal. So calm and self-possessed and masterly was his defense from the charge of piracy preferred at the request of Spain, and so shrewd in its inflaming appeal to public opinion, that his judges were constrained to abandon that line of prosecution, and could discover no way of giving his head to King James save by falling back upon the thirteen-year old sentence of death against him. Of this they now ordered execution.

Never a man who loved his life as dearly as Sir Walter loved it met death as blithely. He dressed himself for the scaffold with that elegance and richness which all his life he had observed. He wore a rough band and black velvet-wrought nightgown over a doublet of hair-colored satin, a black wrought waistcoat, black cut taffeta breeches and ash-colored silk stockings. Under his plumed hat he covered his white locks with a wrought nightcap. This last he bestowed on his way to the scaffold upon a bald-headed old man who had come to take a last look of him, with the observation that he was more in need of it than himself. When he had removed it, it was observed that his hair was not curled as usual. This was a matter that had fretted his barber Peter in the prison of the Gatehouse at Westminster that morning. But Sir Walter had put him off with a laugh and a jest.

"Let them comb it that shall have it," he had said of his own head.

Having taken his leave of the friends who had flocked about him with the observation that he had a long journey before him, he called for the ax, and, when presented to him, ran his fingers along the edge, and smiled:

"Sharp medicine," quoth he, "but a sound cure for all diseases."

When presently the executioner bade him turn his head to the East—

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"It is no great matter which way a man's head stands, so that his heart lies right," he said.

Thus passed one of England's greatest heroes, indeed one of the very makers of this England, and than his death there is none more shameful in the reign of that pusillanimous James, unclean of body and of soul, who sacrificed him to the King of Spain.

A spectator of his death, who suffered for his words—as men must suffer for the regardless utterance of truth—declared that England had not such a head to cut off.

As for Stukeley, the acquisitiveness which had made a Judas of him was destined, by poetic justice, ever desired but rarely forthcoming for knaves, soon to be his ruin. He was caught diminishing the gold coin of the realm by the operation known today as "clipping," and with him was taken his creature Manourie, who, to save himself, turned chief witness against Stukeley. Sir Lewis was sentenced to death, but saved himself by purchasing his pardon at the cost of every ill-gotten shilling he possessed, and he lived thereafter as bankrupt of means as he was of honor.

Yet before all this happened, Sir Lewis had for his part in Sir Walter Raleigh's death come to be an object of execration throughout the land, and to be commonly known as "Sir Judas." At Whitehall he suffered rebuffs and insults that found a climax in the words addressed to him by the lord admiral, to whom he went to give an account of his office.

"Base fellow, darest thou who art the contempt and scorn of men offer thyself in my presence?"

For a man of honor there was but one course. Sir Judas was not a man of honor. He carried his grievance to the king. James leered at him.

"What wouldst thou have me do? Wouldst thou have me hang him? On my soul, if I should hang all that speak ill of thee, all the trees of the country would not suffice, so great is the number."

FRANK BALL'S SONG

by Eugene Cunningham

AMONG the many odd figures prominent in San Francisco in '51, at whom the happy-go-lucky citizens loved to laugh, the Honorable T. Butler King, customs collector, is still remembered by '49-ers because of a single incident:

The customs house burned in May, 1851, and a new building was prepared at Kearny and Washington Streets. So Collector King, on May 28th, had to move the Government treasure—nearly a million dollars—to the new customs house. His methods were distinctively individual. He assembled some thirty gigantic, bearded fellows at the old building and armed them with rifles, revolvers and sabers, then made a fiery speech and commanded the march.

Down Montgomery Street, thronged at that hour, came the fierce procession, with King stepping out in the van like a drum-major. The people stared. In broad daylight on that principal thoroughfare, such elaborate precaution seemed odd. Also, says the annalist, they were grieved at King's apparent distrust of them. They saw the ludicrous side of the affair and began to applaud jeeringly.

A mad wag, Frank Ball, dashed off a song satirizing the collector and sang it in all the saloons. Later he lithographed it, with a caricature of "King's Army" armed with huge wooden horse-pistols, with enormous sabers dangling between their legs. The city roared and bought the sheet at a dollar a copy, while King, a sensitive man, could not appear on the street without hearing at least the last verse—

> "Then each man grasped his sword and gun;
> The babies squalled and the women run,
> And all agreed that King was one
> Of the greatest warriors under the sun!"

But King was a strategist. He dumfounded Ball by offering him a lucrative post in the customs house. The condition was that Ball should halt his singing. Ball accepted. Then some minor clerks, witnessing Ball's rise in the world, tried to employ the same means. But the donkey could not wear the lion's skin. King listened quietly to their rendition of the song—and discharged them.

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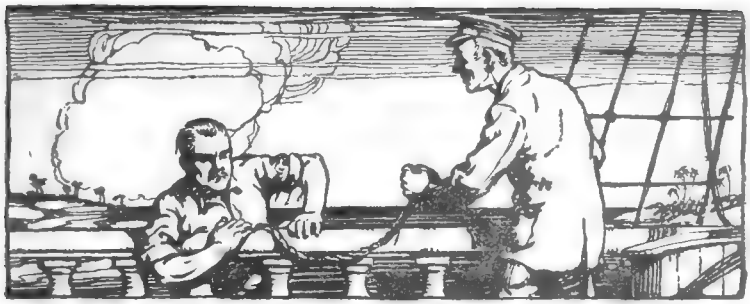

The BARGAIN MATE

by HUBERT ROUSSEL

Author of "The Wreck on Two-Sisters."

"SO YOU'RE wanting a mate," said the commissioner.

He placed the tips of his fingers together and turned in his swivel chair so that he could see the *Terrier* lying at anchor in the harbor under the white-hot Solomon sun.

"What screw do you pay?" he asked.

"We-ll, I gave my last man, Larry Peeler, ten pounds," replied Captain McVittie reluctantly from across the table, "though 'tis exorbitant wages down here, Mr. Bollard."

The commissioner raised his eyebrows.

"You think so?"

"I know so," said Captain McVittie, helping himself to a stogy. "Ye've not heard why I lost Larry; take him for instance. I had him a year, and he never got acclimatized, as ye might say. Many's the time he was down of his back half a cruise and more with fever, an' me doing his work an' furnishing his quinin; when I finally got him so's he could face a mosquito an' keep his feet—then it was yaws. He begun to collect 'em over in the New Hebrides this cruise, and inside of a fortnight the medicine locker's clean, an' him producing a new yaw every day. I doubt if the lousiest bush nigger ever had a prettier collection. And most of 'em being in bad places, I had to put Larry aboard the *Tiare*, she happenin' to pass bound for Suva."

McVittie struck a match and ignited his stogy.

"Aye, we're fryin' on the front lid o' —— out here, Mr. Bollard," he added; "and there ain't but a few men that can stand on their feet day in an' day out, an' therefore earn their wages proper."

"Well, by the Lord, you're one of them, McVittie," said the commissioner, swinging his chair round again. "How long since you were off your feet with fever?"

"It'll be near six years now," said McVittie after a moment's calculation.

"And how long since you had a yaw?"

"Never," affirmed the skipper, "my girlish skin bein' yaw-proof."

They found cause to laugh at that, and—since laughing is hard on the throat in baking heat—to have a drink. The commissioner resumed business.

"Well, the selection isn't large; in fact, there's only one man on Florida now who might go mate with you, McVittie. It would be a blessing if you'd take him; he's drinking himself to death here."

"No, thank ye," said Captain McVittie, setting down his glass firmly. "'Tis a schooner I'm running, not a sanitarium. I've had my experience with the kind, as ye'll recall. I can be lookin' elsewhere if 'tis necessary, Mr. Bollard."

"But really, there are—er—extenuating circumstances in this case," persisted Mr. Bollard. "It's not the usual thing. The chap honestly comes of a good family in England; I—ah—know of them myself. Not only that, but he had a fine record in the Navy during the war, though perhaps

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a trifle wild. Then some—ah—irregularity came up—something in connection with ship's funds, I think—and he was fired out, and went on the loose.

"He's drifted all the way from Shanghai down here; came to Florida as mate in a Chinaman's ketch from New Guinea, and I persuaded him to quit her; it was really no place for a white man. Since then I've been doubtful whether I did the wise thing, for he has spent all his time ashore down in Greson's rum-shack. So you see, I feel a certain responsibility——"

"Which ye would be glad to unload on to me."

"Oh, not that," protested the commissioner; "but I really do think if Granville could get on a white man's craft under a decent skipper he might pull himself together, you know. Of course he's an excellent sailor and navigator."

"Which means nothing a-tall down here," pointed out McVittie. "What did ye say his name was?"

"Granville is the one he goes under—Cedric Granville—though that isn't the full name."

"'Tis enough," said McVittie sourly. "No man so named belongs aboard a Solomon schooner. I'm in a rush, Mr. Bollard, but I'll be lookin' on."

The commissioner again placed his fingers thoughtfully together and looked out of the window.

"Granville's free of fever and yaws," he said. "And I shouldn't be surprized if he were willing to sign on for a bit less than ten quid."

"Eh?"

McVittie was in the act of rising, but he paused.

"How much less, Mr. Bollard?"

"Well—say eight."

Captain McVittie at once sat back and appeared to ponder.

"We-ll, it is nearer reasonable wages," he admitted. "An' healthy, ye say? That's a temptation. After all, I'll be bound over into the New Hebrides again, then down Suva way for repairs about the schooner's rudder, an' I'm in a hurry to start. 'Tis a short cruise and no boozin'-places along the way—and I could drop yer man at Suva did he turn out as rotten as I suspect he will. Aye. We-ll, now, after all, suppose——"

The commissioner clapped his hands, and a black orderly appeared.

"You savvee one fella Granville? You walk along Greson's, fetch'm that fella Granville."

Fifteen minutes later the door opened again, and even McVittie's well-armored old heart was touched by the spectacle of superb human machinery going to rust and ruin that stood before him.

For Cedric Granville proved to be a person an inch or two over six feet, and it was pitifully clear that he had once possessed a muscular development in keeping with his frame. Now the walking-beam shoulders had slumped downward, forcing the chest in and the stomach out like a bushwoman's; his eyes were bleary; his lips hung slightly apart, robbing the mouth of whatever firmness it may have possessed.

He was grotesquely clad in a suit of smudged duck with nothing but a singlet under the coat, and one of the trousers legs was torn off half-way to the knee. On his head was the misshapen remnant of a sun helmet. He took this off, smiling fatuously.

"Gentlemen, I am informed by an agent of this embassy that my presence is desired."

In the shaded room his thin nose seemed actually to twinkle.

The commissioner rose.

"Mr. Granville, this is Captain Angus McVittie, master of the schooner that came in this morning. He is in need of a mate."

McVittie took the limp hand of Cedric Granville. The palm was soft and damp, repulsive to him. He came at once to business.

"Can ye run a gasoline motor, Mr. Granville? I've an auxiliary aboard the *Terrier*."

"Guilty," nodded the wreck.

"Vairy well. I'm bound for the New Hebrides an' Fiji, leaving this afternoon. The screw is—seven pound a month. Will ye go?"

"Seven? Oh, I say now—" murmured Mr. Bollard.

"The destination and salary are of no consequence," came Cedric's reply, as if remarking on the weather. "But I fancy I do need a change; yes, I'll go. Could you advance my first week's wages to Mr. Greson on the beach? He has credited me in about that amount. I would like to suggest, gentlemen, that we seal the bargain with a drink."

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It was all over in five minutes, and McVittie went back aboard the *Terrier* with mixed emotions. A strain in his blood bade him be duly glad of a bargain, while another kept intruding the vexing thought that he had allowed Mr. Bollard cleverly to unload an irksome responsibility on to his shoulders; for one somehow couldn't look at that piece of shark-bait without feeling a responsibility. McVittie, for instance, ordered no whisky from Greson's, though the *Terrier's* stock was well-nigh exhausted.

"REALLY now, unless you boost me up with a small jolt of something," declared Cedric, "I shall never be able to rise from here, skipper; I'll be an absolute liability for the length of the cruise—if I don't die."

The *Terrier* was twelve hours out of Florida, and Granville lay fully dressed in his bunk where he had pitched, blind drunk, on coming aboard, and where he had slept profoundly until five minutes ago, when McVittie had shaken and pummeled him into consciousness. The skipper considered it time for Cedric to begin standing his watches; the mate was perfectly willing—as soon as he had a steadying drink or two. But there certain simple plans of McVittie's had begun to operate; there would be no liquor drunk aboard the *Terrier*, he informed the mate, for the length of the cruise.

Cedric had stared at him in blank, sluggish surprize; then he had delivered his ultimatum—no liquor, no work.

"I say now, it's a bally impossibility, you know," he added. "You must be joking. In fact, the whole business looks like a joke. How did I get aboard this barge anyway? Was I shanghaied?"

"Don't flatter yerself," McVittie retorted, his face reddening; "no self-respectin' crimp would have ye, you rum-sop."

He doubled his fists.

"Get up and stand yer watch!"

Slowly a genuine fear displaced the incredulity in Cedric's bloodshot eyes.

"But look here," he whined, "really—really, you know. I can't, my good fellow. I remember—I signed on in the commissioner's office, didn't I? But you didn't say anything then about— Well, the day of the bucko skipper is past! It's unthinkable, beginning the day without fueling up, as it were; I live on the blooming stuff, you know."

"Get up," repeated McVittie, and made an ominous move toward Cedric.

Cedric started to turn his face to the wall—but reconsidered. Slowly and with much loud groaning he unwound his long form from the bunk. He sat up on the edge. His face was pasty, and he trembled from head to foot.

"Souse yourself," invited McVittie, indicating a bucket of water beside the companion stairs.

Again Cedric hesitated, but after a glance at the skipper's set mouth, lurched to the bucket and bathed his face. Obi, the *Terrier's* cook, entered, setting on the table a breakfast of coffee, omelet, scones and jam.

But Cedric had no appetite for food; indeed the sight of it seemed to increase his discomfort acutely. With a gulp he stumbled up the stairs to the deck. After breakfast McVittie found him there, hanging miserably over the rail amidships, staring at the greenish water that slid past the *Terrier's* side under the fan of breeze.

"Really—" began Cedric.

"Ye'll have the deck till noon, Mr. Granville," snapped McVittie, and after giving the course and the usual instructions he returned below for a nap.

He awoke on the stroke of twelve. It was stifling hot, and the schooner was motionless. He rose and went on deck. The *Terrier's* sails hung lifeless; sea and air were caught in a dead calm. McVittie grunted.

On the for'ard hatch seven of the naked black crew were squatting with their kinky heads together. Aft, the eighth black had abandoned the wheel and was sleeping in the narrow shade of the bulwark; and beside him, the battered sun helmet over his face, lay Cedric, also sound asleep.

Now, though McVittie's crew of Ysabel boys was a more or less broken lot, the Solomon Islands and vicinity is no place for white men to sleep unguarded among blacks at any time. McVittie flamed.

"Get the —— up from there!" he bellowed.

The crew scattered; the helmsman was up and at his post on the instant; but Cedric did not stir. McVittie had to prod him with his foot.

"Oh, you!" groaned the mate, opening his eyes. "I say now, for ——'s sake why didn't you let me sleep? I was comfortable, at least. There's nothing to be done; no

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wind, you know. And I'll go blotto—off my chump—if I have to go on like this!"

As he said that he suddenly began to twitch violently all over. McVittie stared contemptuously down at him; obviously the man was in a dangerous condition due to the sudden breaking off of his wonted stimulant.

"If I thought ye was lying I'd bash yer jaw in," said the skipper. "I will if I catch ye sleepin' again. Come here."

He led the way into the cuddy and unlocked a drawer of the cupboard. Inside were several bottles of whisky. From one of these he poured a scant two fingers into a small tumbler and shoved it across the table. Cedric swallowed it at a gulp. He stared hungrily as McVittie replaced the bottle.

"Oh, I say! Really, I can't get along on——"

"Out o' here! Quick!" roared McVittie, and doubled his fists. "'Get along?' 'Twas yer last drink for the cruise, understand? Now get out an' start up the engine. This —— calm's liable to last a week."

About three o'clock McVittie, standing at the wheel, heard from aft a sudden hollow pounding, which almost instantly rose into a horrible, eery rattle. Then there was a sharp crack, and the *Terrier's* engine stopped.

With an oath McVittie scrambled down the after hatch. He was no mechanic, but one tug at the motor's flywheel was sufficient to convince him that it had developed some grave internal trouble; he was unable to budge it with a four-foot bar; a burned bearing at the least.

Frothing, McVittie charged on deck and into the cuddy, where Cedric sat staring at the wall. Before the skipper's rage Cedric admitted quite calmly that he had neglected to note whether there was sufficient oil in the engine's crank-case when he started it some three hours before.

"Really, you know," he defended, "I'm not just myself, sober like this, old fellow. Can't you see your bally scheme won't work at all?"

"'Twill cost ye yer wages for the trip, Mr. Granville!" McVittie bit out through white lips.

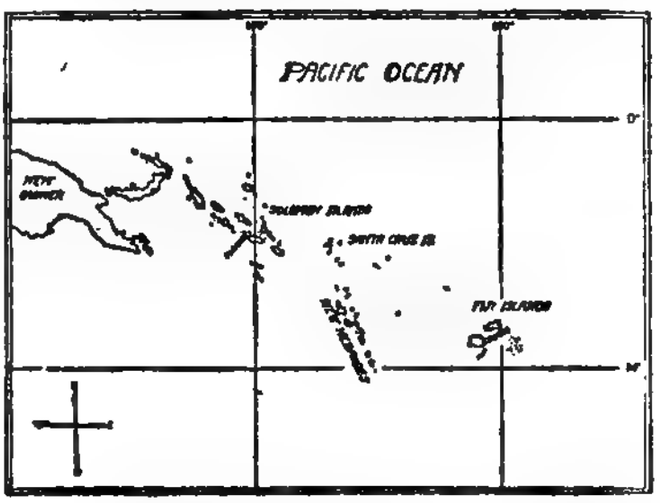
His whole body was trembling; and, feeling that he could not restrain himself from violence another moment, he flung out of the cuddy.

Thus it went for several days. The wind picked up, and the *Terrier* made good southing. Cedric ate less than enough to keep a man alive, stood his watches after a fashion, and continually cast longing glances at the whisky drawer.

But though he whined and pleaded and threatened, McVittie was coldly adamant; he got not another drink. He failed to go crazy, despite his predictions. Some of the red webbing went out of his eyes, and his trembling stopped.

But a climax was brewing, and it came at Ati-Ati. Juliet was the cause, Juliet being McVittie's beloved coal-black cat and the official mascot, rat and roach catcher aboard the *Terrier*.

Juliet had been coveted by one Nguma, the chief of Ati-Ati village, since the first



trip of the *Terrier* to that place, some six months before. Nguma was eighty, the owner of a fine collection of human heads and a loathsome case of *ngari-ngari*.

On the occasion of his initial visit to the *Terrier* his piggish little eyes had stood out with wonder, for Juliet was the first of her species he had ever beheld. And he straightway conceived a great desire that she should grace his stew-pot. When Captain McVittie refused and insisted upon giving only stick tobacco in exchange for Nguma's ivory-nuts, the look on the old chief's crafty face had caused the skipper thereafter to take up an anchorage well offshore and keep a watchful eye out when conducting business with Ati-Ati village.

The bight at Ati-Ati, elliptical in shape, was well over two miles wide at the center. McVittie, bereft of auxiliary power, sailed

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very carefully through the narrow, mangrove-bordered passage and dropped anchor with over a mile of water between him and Nguma's village. Then he waited for canoes to come out, but none came.

Twilight gave way to dark; and after supper McVittie, pondering the non-appearance of boats from shore, thought it might be as well to keep a white watch. He explained the situation, gave Cedric the first hitch, and himself turned in to sleep till midnight. Just before doing so he noticed that Juliet was coiled up asleep atop the taffrail.

A terrible yowl of feline terror split into McVittie's slumber, shattered it and brought him jerking into consciousness. He sat up dizzily, thinking he had been dreaming. But on the instant it came again—a spluttering, hissing wail. Then there was the frantic scuffling of feet on the deck above, a hollow thump, and the sound of paddles being rapidly dipped.

"What the blazes!" roared McVittie.

His dive out of his little stateroom and across the cuddy consumed not more than an instant; yet in that flash he had time to note two things—that the whisky drawer of the cupboard stood open, and that the clock pointed half-past three. Then he bounded out on deck.

Apparently it was deserted. McVittie ran to the taffrail; there was no sign of Juliet. Somewhere in the dense blackness astern he could hear the stealthy dip of invisible paddles. Impulsively he leveled the automatic pistol he had brought up in that direction. Then he let it drop; a cat that long in Nguma's hands was a dead cat. And he had thought of Cedric.

He turned and retraced his steps. The sound of snoring guided him to a spot abaft the mainmast; and there he came upon the mate, stretched on the hard boards, a quart bottle, half-emptied of its amber contents, beside him. McVittie stirred him with his foot.

"Get up!"

It was five minutes before Cedric became fully conscious.

"Oh, you, skipper!" he grunted then. "I say now, what——"

"Ye've a little job ahead, Mr. Granville. D' ye feel all right?"

"For the first time in six days!" affirmed the mate positively. "Er—as you'll see, I was forced to help myself to a bit of ammunition. I used a pry-bar on the drawer. Trust you'll pardon my crudeness—take it out of my wages, you know. But a job? My, yes! With a bit of an eye-opener I'll be able to——"

He reached for the bottle beside him; but McVittie's foot sent it flying against the bulwark, where it smashed.

"Oh, I say!" Cedric began to protest.

While McVittie roused him he had sent Obi below for a hurricane lantern. The boy now returned, and the skipper took the light.

"Do ye come along," he ordered; and Cedric, still protesting, rose and followed him to the bulwark.

Quickly McVittie lashed the lantern to the ratlines of the main, two feet above his head. From that position it threw a bright glow all over the deck. Cedric had seated himself on the rail.

"Get up," commanded the skipper, dropping to the deck.

Cedric obeyed mechanically.

"Put up yer fists."

"Eh?"

Then comprehension dawned on the mate.

"Oh, I say now, let's don't be silly about a blooming bot——"

"Shut up an' put up yer hands! 'Tis more nor a bottle o' rum. While ye was snoozin' Nguma's been aboard an' helped himself to my Juliet—she'll be *kai-kai* in his belly afore morning! But 'tis not altogether for Juliet I'm going to lick ye; 'tis more for stealin' and for general rottenness, you yellow, thievin' booze swab. If ye're feeling so good now, take that for a starter."

In justice it must be said that from the instant McVittie's first clout drew blood from his lips, Cedric Granville became a different sort of person. Manly and gentlemanly instincts, drowned and ossified by untold gallons of cheap liquor, must have been stung into life again by the skipper's knuckles. He was in no sense "dead" drunk; that blow seemed to knock him into another being. His blue eyes took on a glint, and a queer smile came to his lips. When the skipper lashed out at him again he received in return a fist beneath his own ear that sent him reeling backward.

McVittie swore and leaped in like a tiger. And there on the quarter-deck, with for spectators only a few tropic stars

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and the schooner's black crew squatting for'ard, they had it out; Cedric rangy and oddly calm; McVittie thick-set and almost old enough to be his father.

For several minutes there was little to choose between them. Then the skipper whipped over a clean blow to the point of Cedric's chin which staggered and dazed him. And thereafter the mate went through a minute of awful punishment.

"That for the engine, an' that for yer stealin', and that for Juliet," grunted McVittie as he pumped his fists into his weakened adversary.

It was a terrible beating. In the end Cedric went down under the merciless assault, staggered up, was sent thudding to the deck again, and lay there, gasping through puffed, bleeding lips. Blood trickled also from his nose, and an eye was half-shut. McVittie fetched a bucket of water, dashed it over him, then helped him up.

"'Tis for the good o' yer soul," he said grimly. "Now will ye try to stand watch like an officer an' a gentleman till I can get into my clothes?"

He was astounded to see that Cedric's misshapen lips were smiling!

"My word, it was—a neat licking, skipper!" came weakly from behind them. "I'll—I'll try!"

And Cedric thrust out his hand. McVittie took it.

Going below, he divested himself of his bloody pajamas, washed and dressed. In twenty minutes he returned to relieve Cedric.

And again he found the *Terrier's* quarterdeck deserted! Only that this time a minute search from bowsprit to taffrail and then below-decks failed to reveal the slightest trace of the mate. Nor could the blacks for'ard throw any light on the matter; they had returned to sleep immediately the fight ended.

A creeping and awful fear invaded Captain McVittie's mind. Suppose his beating had produced an effect the reverse of what he expected. What had Granville meant by his queer smile anyway? Suppose——

There was six fathoms of water under the *Terrier;* the whaleboat was stowed in its davits. McVittie went to the rail and stared into the blackness, trying to read the answer to the riddle. There was only silence, utter and baffling. Where could Cedric have gone but overboard?

"Ahoy, Granville!" he shouted several times; there was no answer.

At last he turned away bewildered and sat down on the hatch, and his thoughts grew as black as the night.

THE somber half-light of dawn was spreading over the bight when McVittie was startled by a splash near at hand. Then a voice, weak but recognizable as Cedric's, hailed:

"I say, skipper! A bit of a lift, please."

McVittie bounded up and sent a rope-end spinning in the direction of a dimly visible shape in the water. A moment later he was hauling the mate over the rail. McVittie's eyes bulged.

"What the blazes?" he demanded. "D' ye mean to say——"

"I've been ashore for a bit," Cedric informed him, and again his swollen lips were smiling.

"Ashore! Ye mean t' say ye swum that? Two miles?"

"It felt a sight more like ten," panted the mate; "but I used to do fifteen in the service. You see, skipper, that spanking you gave me a while ago—well, it was the medicine I needed! By Heaven, yes! Set me up no end. Made me realize how rotten I'd got, physically and morally. That was the first time I'd ever stolen anything, though not the first time I've been accused of theft. But my word! I've been seeing things differently ever since! So while you were below I just blundered ashore to see if maybe I couldn't get a line on Juliet."

McVittie's jaw was hanging open.

"Wha-a-at! You mean—you went ashore to Nguma's village at night an' unarmed!"

"Hardly! I took along that four-foot bit of spar that was stowed aft," corrected Cedric. "But I guess I was too late; the chief and his gang denied ever having seen Juliet. However, I took a look through the village as best I could in the dark. I—ah—I don't think we'd better try to trade for nuts here, skipper. One of the villagers had an accident and got a rather nasty cut on the head while we were searching. He stumbled and fell against my stick."

McVittie continued to stare at him. A great light was dawning on the skipper.

"Boy! Ye cleaned out Nguma's village

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with naught but a bit o' wood? Holy howde-do!" he muttered wonderingly.

Then he began to laugh, but suddenly checked himself.

"That nigger that tripped put a nasty lump aside yer head, didn't he? By ——, Mr. Granville, if I called ye yellow I'm ashamed o' myself! Will ye kindly allow me to beg yer pardon?"

And this time it was McVittie's hand that went out and was grasped.

Just then there floated down from overhead a long and plaintive wail. Both men started, and in the now full light looked aloft.

"—— my slats!" cried the skipper.

"Well, I say now!" exclaimed Cedric, and burst into a laugh.

For high aloft on the mainmast crosstrees, where obviously she had fled to escape Nguma's lustful hands, perched Juliet, a quivering black ball demanding vociferously to be fetched down. It was McVittie himself who scrambled up the ratlines after her and coaxed her onto his arm, where Juliet clung so ardently that her claws left several long scratches on the bare skin.

The three of them went down into the cuddy, and McVittie's heart felt big and soft.

"Man, ye're shivering fit to loosen yer teeth!" he suddenly exclaimed, looking at Cedric. "Here, this'll fix ye."

And he reached for one of the bottles in the cupboard drawer.

At that Cedric began to shiver harder than ever. He smiled at McVittie, but with no mirth in his expression.

"N-no, thanks," he said in a gulp, and turned away. "I'll get on dry clothes. That'll be all I need."

Cedric was right; the trading at Ati-Ati was spoiled as far as the *Terrier* was concerned. As the morning wore on not even a fishing-dugout, much less the chief's pretentious war-canoe, put out from the village. There was only an ominous silence ashore, broken spasmodically by the dismal thumping of a war-drum somewhere in the bush.

"Evidently not wantin' our company," said McVittie at noon. "Well, there's Gula and Mgona and Kari-Kari yet."

So the *Terrier* got sail on her and glided out of the passage.

Next morning, on the spot where Juliet's claws had punctured the skin of his arm, Captain McVittie had an incipient yaw. There was no doubt about it, he had fallen heir to one of the dread and sometimes fatal perforating ulcers that breed in the stagnant, superheated air of the Solomons and New Hebrides and are the curse of those islands.

"To think—twenty years in these waters, and 'tis the first one!" McVittie said disgustedly.

He swore and soused the yaw with peroxid.

"We-ll, 'twill find me tougher meat nor the niggers; 'twill not eat far into me."

Cedric's many wounds, on the contrary, healed without infection; and the following few days worked a change almost unbelievable in him.

"My word," he confessed to McVittie as they approached Kari-Kari, "it seems as though I'd been waiting four years for some one to give me that lacing! It shook me as nothing else could have—I prided myself on being something of a boxer in the service. And the stealing—it came just right, you know. I knew then I'd hit rock-bottom; it was time to check up if I was ever going to."

The whisky drawer was now unlocked, and entirely safe.

"Ye said the other day 'twas not the first time ye'd been accused o' stealing," remarked McVittie in a fatherly tone.

Cedric's face darkened.

"I was chucked out of the service for suspected mishandling of certain funds," he nodded. "I didn't find out till a year later in Shanghai, when I met a discharged petty officer off my old ship, who the real thief was. He knew."

"And did ye not try to get back?" inquired the skipper.

"No—I didn't; I was pretty far gone by then; didn't care! Now—I do; and some day——"

The mate's eyes clouded, his fists clenched, and he broke off.

"What I want to do now is to get back in physical shape; it gives me a touch to look at myself! How's the lagoon here at Kari-Kari for swimming?"

"There's aboot a shark to the square yard," said McVittie.

Despite this warning and others more urgent, twice a day for the three days they lay at Kari-Kari Cedric stripped and went over the rail; and McVittie was forced to admire even as he hotly asseverated that

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the other was a hundred brands of fool. The third day Cedric did well over five miles; at Mgona he stretched this to eight. The walking-beam shoulders came straight; there was color in his face; his eyes were clear and sparkling.

Indeed it seemed as if the kind fate that for a score of years had strangely protected McVittie in a savage country had transferred itself to Cedric—and forgotten its former ward. For the loathsome yaw on McVittie's arm ate steadily deeper, and four others had now appeared; there was a new one beside the first, two on his shin as a result of barking it against the hatch-coaming, and another mysteriously chose the instep of his left foot, rendering him practically cripple.

Then on the afternoon they cleared Mgona the last large bottle of disinfectant fell from the cabin table with an unexpected roll and was smashed, and McVittie was left with no means of treating his ulcers.

" 'Tis well we're heading for Suva an' a doctor now," he said, a look of genuine concern on his face at last. "These things dinna stop when they come to a blood-vessel, ye know."

"If I hadn't been such a miserable yellow dog," swore Cedric as they lay becalmed on a glassy sea the fourth morning, "we'd be kicking along now under auxiliary power."

He groaned.

"You should have shot me, skipper."

"We-ll now, I was tempted to," admitted McVittie.

Though he tried to smile, his face was twisted with pain. Suddenly a quiver ran over his body, and with an oath he hopped across the cuddy and pawed in the medicine-locker for quinin, swallowing a thirty-grain dose.

" 'Twas like a fever warnin'," he explained.

HIS diagnosis proved correct. And though he gulped quinin throughout the airless, sweltering day, it had no effect. Just before dark Captain McVittie—for the first time in six years—went off his feet with fever. So bludgeon-like was the final attack that he had barely time to drag himself to his bunk and mumble something about "careful if it comes on from nor'west" to Cedric before he was out of his head.

The mate promptly smothered him in blankets, but when scarcely through with the job was called on deck by a terrific, snapping flash of lightning, followed by deafening thunder. He found no stars visible, and the sky to starboard a stygian wall.

Even as he yelled stentorian orders to lower tops'ls a howling blast smote the *Terrier* broadside on, pressing her down to her rail. Then the calm broke up in a series of those vicious northwest squalls that are the bane of navigators in the western South Pacific. For the rest of the night Cedric had hardly a chance to think of his skipper; and McVittie, though he became conscious and sensed the state of things, was too weak to rise, and drifted into a sort of stupor.

Cedric roused him at dawn. On getting control of his senses McVittie took one look at the mate's face and asked weakly:

"We-ll, what is it? Foul news, of course. The rudder?"

There were tears in Cedric's eyes.

"Yes—it's the rudder, skipper—carried away," he blurted miserably. "How'd you guess? We sideswiped something submerged about three hours ago, and it snapped off clean at the gudgeons! I don't believe it was anything afloat, like wreckage; it was a rock! But I've just been checking the chart, and there're no rocks shown anywhere near our position!"

He sat down and held his head in his hands.

"Lad, there'll be rocks hereabouts never shown on any chart," said McVittie. "I tried to tell ye, feelin' a nor'wester might be coming. Queer, 'twas them weak rudder-pins I was going to have overhauled at Suva. How's the wind?"

"Hauled round west."

"We're not movin'."

"No. I've got the sea-anchor broken out rather than run farther off the course."

McVittie was silent for a time, and Cedric felt what was going on in his head.

"We-ll, do ye help me on deck," he said finally.

They paused on the way for a cup of coffee, then went up, McVittie clinging to Cedric's shoulder and hopping on his one good foot.

There was little to see. The ocean was calm; there was a moderate breeze—and the *Terrier* without a rudder was as helpless to take advantage of it as if she had been a

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sodden log. McVittie inspected the oldest and most horrible yaw on his forearm, and grinned.

"Aye, I'm too tough for 'em, lad; 'tis makin' no headway now!"

"You're lying," promptly accused the miserable Cedric. "You know and I know if that thing isn't attended to by a doctor within forty-eight hours or so it'll eat into an artery, and then—then, my God! I'll feel like a murderer!"

"There, there, lad," soothed the skipper. "Ye're badly in need o' sleep to say such things. Do ye get below and nap till noon—then ye can take a crew an' the whaleboat an' make for Suva, and I'll hang on here. But get the sleep first; ye'll need it."

Cedric, dead tired, went obediently below and did as he was told, for he knew well enough the futility of keeping a watch for passing craft. In their position they might easily float for a month or a year without being sighted.

The whaleboat, as McVittie pointed out, was the only alternative; and McVittie, the mate knew, would never leave his schooner while she floated. Cedric would have to go it alone, and therefore keep constantly awake on the two-hundred-mile reach to Suva.

But McVittie failed to stir him at noon, and when Cedric awoke of his own accord and went on deck it was to find the skipper at the rail, a pair of glasses to his eyes.

The mate sprang to his side.

"What is it? Anything?"

For answer McVittie passed him the binoculars.

"By Heaven!" shouted Cedric. "Yes! It's a cruiser—British cruiser, or I'm a toad! And heading to cross our bows. Should there be one in these waters now?"

McVittie nodded, and Cedric leaped for the flag-locker.

About half an hour later the trim cruiser hove-to some distance to windward of the *Terrier*, and as a considerable swell was running, she lowered away a boat which pulled toward the disabled schooner. Presently it sheered alongside, and an officer stood up in the sternsheets, caught the rail and leaped over.

And then something happened which McVittie's fever-lightened brain was for a time unable to grasp. As the smartly uniformed officer started aft for the quarterdeck, Cedric, who had been standing in the cuddy companion, his head half below the hatch, suddenly emerged and blocked his way. The mate's face was deathly pale, but there was a queer, tight smile on his lips.

"Hello, Gaffney," he said.

The officer, who wore a lieutenant's insignia, halted and gulped. Then his face slowly drained to a chalky white. Then he seemed trying to speak, but nothing articulate was produced by his working lips.

"Changed ships, I see. Hardly expected to run on me here, eh?"

Cedric continued to smile at him. Then of a sudden, without warning, his fist shot out, catching the other squarely on the chin. The lieutenant went reeling backward against the cabin trunk and clung there a moment dazedly; then with a snarl he rushed for Cedric.

There was an alarmed roar from the boat's crew, who had witnessed this from alongside, and the men began to swarm over the rail to the defense of their superior. But Captain McVittie's brain, staggered for a moment, had begun to work with its wonted keenness, and he had put two and two together. As the sailors leaped to the deck, suddenly they found their way barred by the black and business-like muzzle of an automatic pistol.

"There now, lads," warned the grizzled skipper, "dinna act rude. 'Tis a strictly personal matter being settled between the gentlemen, an' ye've no call to butt in. Enjoy yerselfs all ye please—but as spectators only."

What the astounded boat's crew witnessed on the *Terrier's* quarterdeck during the following ten minutes formed the chief topic of conversation among the men aboard H.M.S. *Hawksbill* for months to come. The first time Gaffney thudded to the deck behind him McVittie completely forgot himself and turned around. But the sailors, relieved of his vigil, did not stir; Naval regulations were forgotten now in the gripping thrill of a fair fight. Spectators they remained.

Lieutenant Gaffney was game with a desperate gameness. Four times in quick succession he was felled by Cedric's crushing blows and staggered up to continue the fight. But the fifth time he went down, bleeding and broken, his true color was

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revealed—from under the skirt of his tunic he suddenly whipped a revolver, and a shot narrowly missed the mate's head.

The next instant Cedric had kicked the revolver spinning out of his hand and jerked him to his feet. Then he crashed his right fist with all his might into Gaffney's chin, who flopped on his face and could only writhe weakly.

The mate gathered him under his arm as if he had been a sack.

"My word, something to stiffen your faith in Providence, skipper," was all he said to McVittie with his queer calmness. "This snake happens to be the man who mishandled funds aboard the *Calypso* five years ago, for which theft I left the service in disgrace. Am I telling the truth?" he demanded, shaking the limp bundle.

Lieutenant Gaffney's purple, distorted lips moved faintly; but no sound issued from them, only bloody bubbles. He ended by weakly nodding his battered and gory head.

"Put him in the boat," Cedric instructed the men. "And you'd better go along, skipper, and let the doctor get to work on those yaws as soon as possible. Tell the commander if he'll give us a tow-line and a man to take charge I'll be very glad to come aboard. There are things I want Gaffney to explain to him, and I want him to pass them on home."

Which was how it came about that four months later Captain McVittie was looking for another mate.

THE "HOUNDS" OR "REGULATORS"

by Eugene Cunningham

IN 1849 there existed in San Francisco a gang of desperadoes whose exploits seem worthy of chronicling, because indirectly they caused the germination of the First Vigilance Committee.

Composed of riffraff of the world, of whom the annalist aptly says, "their baggage was on their backs, their purses in every honest man's pocket," this unique band coolly announced themselves "Regulators," guardians of the community against the insolent Spanish foreigners.

Usually the "Hounds" directed their attacks against Chileans, Peruvians and Mexicans, avoiding the muscular American unless he was alone. The foreigners, unaggressive and somewhat scorned by the whites, suffered raids on their tent colonies during which they were beaten and robbed of their belongings. Busy amassing fortunes, the honest folk let municipal government go hang, not even providing for a police force.

Encouraged by success, the Hounds established headquarters in a tent, facetiously styled "Tammany Hall." Here at the assembly-beat on a drum they assembled in large numbers, ready to commit any crime.

On Sunday, July 15, 1849, the Hounds made their greatest raid, plundering and maltreating foreigners all over San Francisco, firing wantonly into the helpless crowds. The white population and the officials were powerless to oppose them.

But next day the aroused citizens were called to Portsmouth Square by Alcalde Leavenworth. Prominent men organized a Special Police of 230 members. Grimly these volunteers gathered in the Hounds, capturing twenty that afternoon, including their leader, Sam Roberts, after several pitched battles.

A Special Court, with more orderly proceedings than regular courts usually displayed, found the prisoners guilty of assault and other crimes and sentenced them to varying terms of imprisonment.

There being no prison available, the sentences were chiefly for moral effect; but the ruffians, fearing lynching, fled. It had proved too easy for a determined public opinion to cope with civic disease. This assembly in the Plaza really forecast the Vigilance Committee of '51, for San Franciscans had discovered the basic truth that in the citizens' hands rests the remedy for all abuses.

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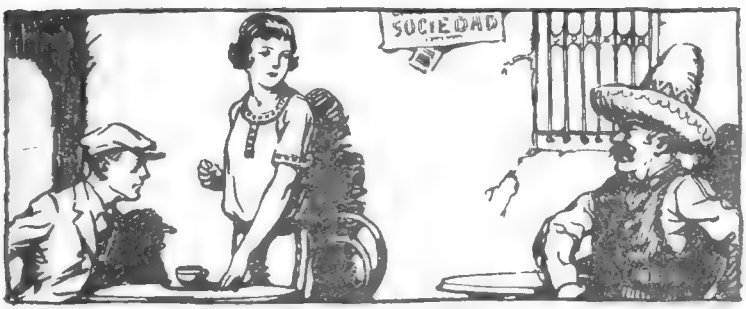

WRONG BLOOD—STRONG BLOOD

by GORDON YOUNG

Author of "Shipwreck," "Horrezko," etc.

WHEN I told one of those eagle-eyed, Buddha-faced men, known to some people as bulls, that I believed Terry Wade might have been a decent citizen if handled right, my friend the bull, whose repartee had been sharpened on the East Side, said that I was full of prunes.

His derision was excited, too, because Terry Wade in Mexico had seemed an odd, friendly, partly amusing and nearly pathetic little figure; whereas, my friend's word for it, he was just a dirty little crook.

In the department of the Central Office which is given over to biographical data, Terry Wade was not without distinction. His photograph was there. His finger-prints. His record. He had shot three men. His age was nineteen.

New York gunmen are a short-lived litter. Thirty is a grandfatherly age among them. Dope, hooch and bulls are bad for their health. Fair ladies and loot often cause them to fall on one another and extinguish themselves after the manner of the famous Kilkenny cats.

Two of those whose departure from Broadway and environs was commemorated by small notches filed on the handle of one of Terry Wade's automatics were, like himself, men of the night.

One of these had been what is known as a bad actor, probably on account of his nerve.

He had possessed notches of his own.

In the matter of distributing the proceeds from the sale of certain wines, rugs, furnishings and knick-knacks brought in a truck from a house near Riverside Drive while the watchman slept under the soporific bump of a blackjack, hot words were passed.

The bad actor, claiming the lion's share, cited his reputation and threatened to blow Terry Wade's young and inexperienced head off his shoulders.

Terry, being young and inexperienced, took the bad actor's words at their face value, and plugged him.

The police knew just about what had happened. They asked impertinent questions of Terry and his friends. But Terry and his friends assumed the ignorance of a Chinese witness; so the case fizzled.

The next episode was somewhat similar.

Terry, having taken a place of importance among his fellows, was one night apportioning himself the largest slice of swag-pie when one of the tough customers made a protest. Or as Terry would have expressed it, "started to beef." The tough customer was full of hooch and warlike notions.

A gun was found in the hand of the tough customer, but it was generally believed that this did not appear there until he had lost interest in such worldly vanities as loot and leadership. This gun, so some people said, was to be a sort of red herring which defendant's lawyers could drag back and

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forth in the courtroom. It was never needed.

The police again reached out their meddlesome fingers and nailed Terry Wade, who swore hotly that he had been eight blocks from the scene of the crime.

But this time the police had a case, or thought they did.

However, a jury of his peers believed the four witnesses who swore that Terry was in a poker game with them at the time of the killing. The bright young men from the District Attorney's office tried to interest the jurors in the police record of each of the alibi witnesses. But the jury seemed to feel that the police were prejudiced.

After that the bulls began to observe Terry with a sort of proprietory air. They felt sure that sooner or later he would come to them, either by way of the morgue or as a boarder.

Then Officer McNab entered a small café one midnight while Terry and his two friends were—as they would have said—"putting the joint in the air;" that is, holding it up.

Terry showed his resentment of such impertinence on the part of the officer by lacing a bullet through his ribs.

Terry got away. He knew that he couldn't beat that case except with his legs.

It is one thing to shoot a friend or two; another and infinitely more dangerous thing to shoot an hereditary enemy like a bull.

Terry figured there were just two ways for him to dodge the chair. One was to take the Dutch way out, which would have necessitated putting a hole through his own head. He regarded this with disfavor.

The other was to "do a lamm;" that is, to duck, go on a journey, get far away and stay there.

Terry had never been ten miles west of Broadway.

The Canadian border was near; but the officers over there were a meddlesome lot, and often they snapped up a guy that hadn't done them any wrong and held him till his enemies could come and get him.

Friends carried him out of town in a car, bought him a ticket to Chicago, slipped him a roll, told him it was a bonehead play to shoot a cop and advised him to keep going until he was well across the border—Mexican border.

Terry did as told.

II

AS HE came through the door of the Café Gran Sociedad I put him down as a stray tourist who had somehow got a hundred and fifty miles off the beaten path, and was now hungry.

He was small, undersized. He wore a floppy cap and a belted coat. His face was thin and had a doubtful, nervous, eager look.

He had come in out of the bright sunlight and stood blinking and peering. He shuffled his feet over the tiled floor and stared about hopefully.

The Café Gran Sociedad was practically deserted. It was siesta time.

I was in an alcove under a grilled window with a month-old newspaper.

Hipolito had spread the cloth that he used for wiping tables across his face and lay forward on an arm, taking his rest.

Terry Wade looked all about with an air of lonely eagerness. He felt out of place, uncertain. When he moved, his feet clicked on the tiles like footsteps in an empty church. When he spoke his voice had the strange hollowness of a shout in a tomb.

Perhaps he had never been in a church or a tomb; but he had the feeling of strangeness that those places give.

"Heh? Anybody doin' the honors?"

His voice had no assurance. He seemed surprized that his words made so much noise. For a moment he seemed startled, as if about to withdraw.

Hipolito stirred drowsily and came up from under the dish-cloth. He lighted a cigaret and with insolent leisure approached the guest who had interrupted his peaceful snoozing.

Terry Wade spoke eagerly, almost confidentially.

"Say, listen. I wants some ham an' eggs. Get me? I ain't had no ham an' eggs since I come to this country. Say listen. I don't want no beans. I don't want no pancakes, I don't want no more red pepper. I wants just plain ham an', see?"

He said it with earnest persuasiveness, his eyes very intent for a gleam of understanding on Hipolito's lean, leathern face.

"No *sabe*," said Hipolito indifferently, making a swipe at the table's top.

"Say, listen. I'm hungry—but I don't want no beans!"

"*Que quiere usted?*" Hipolito inquired

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with an air of weariness, adding, *"señor"* with impertinent delay, as if trying out this scrubby little gringo who looked harmless and seemed helpless.

Americans were not popular just then at Pachuca. The mines had quit paying Miguel Milta to guard them, and Miguel had therefore stopped flinging his thousand pesos a day through the streets and stores of Pachuca. It was those tight-fisted, mine-owning gringos who had brought about the business depression in Pachuca.

Hipolito compounded insolence with sleepiness, rattled off a little Spanish with a questioning look, shrugged his shoulders and was turning away.

Terry Wade caught at his arm.

"Youse jus' bring me somethin' to eat, see?"

He opened his mouth and poked a finger at it, then masticated rapidly with an appearance of relish, all the while earnestly regarding Hipolito's dull face.

"No *sabe*," said Hipolito, lighting one end of a match, touching the stub of his cigaret, extinguishing the flame and replacing the match behind his ear—all with the air of performing a ritual.

"All right then, bring me beans! *Fry-hole-les*, see? An' *coff-fay*, see? Coffee, see? *Coff-fay!* Don't youse un'erstand your own lingo?"

There was no doubt that Hipolito was stupid, but he was rather overdoing it.

Beside, I knew what it was to be tired of beans and tortillas.

"——!" cried Terry Wade, thrusting out a thin little white hand. "A white man! Say, listen. I didn't know a stranger could look so good to me. I ain't been so glad to see nobody since I was spilled into his ol' world.

"Say, listen. You shake this lingo off your tongue. Just learn me to say ham an' eggs—an' beer. Won't youse? An' fried spuds.

"Order 'em up. I'm payin'. Tell this bird ever'thing youse know, see? It'll be fun to see what we get.

"*Serve-vay-za!* What a —— of a way to say beer!

"I'm from little ol' N'York. Travelin' for me health."

He gave a touching cough and pressed his hand to his chest.

"The bone-setter tells me to try some wop place," he went on. . . .

"Education must be a great t'ing. How do youse say ham an' egs again? An' *serve-vey-zaz*—that's beer. *Serve-vey-zaza!* Can youse beat it!

"Say, listen. This travelin's the bunk.

"I knew this was a great country, but I find N'York don't fill up so much of it as I t'ink.

"There ain't nothin' to do on a train but go get a drink of ice water, come back an' set down, look outta the window, go get another drink of ice water, come back, set down, look outta the window.

"An' sleeping on a shelf gives me a pain. It's like a hop joint widout the dreams.

"No more travelin' in mine! On that train I eats some crab salad what has a past. I nearly croak. I gets into a poker game an' is nicked for three hundred an' eighty-two beans. I speaks to a lady what looks lonesome, an' she tells the conductor I'm fresh. Then I'm countin' telegraph poles to occupy me mind and lose me new lid outta the window. We don't have a wreck or nothin'.

"*Serve-vay-za!* No wonder I ain't been able to get nothin' fit to drink!

"You see, listen. I jus' goes into a place where they has tickets an' lays down some money, an' I takes what they give me. I gets on a train an' rides till I'm poked off. Then I looks around an' takes another ticket. I don't know where I'm goin'. I jus' go. Travelin' for me health, y'see, ain't like going some place. An' beans! Say, listen. If youse was to bury me, I'd sprout."

That afternoon I took him out to the mine and showed him to the superintendent. The superintendent was from New York and liked vaudeville. As we had not seen a white man in six months, outside of the three or four on duty with us at the mine, Mr. Terry Wade had everything his own way.

Perhaps he thought he was far enough from Broadway to use his own name. Anyhow he did. And he gave us exiles all the gossip of the Big Town. He was as friendly as a stray pup, as mild of manner, he seemed sickly and fragile among the half-dozen huskies whom a parsimonious company thought were big enough to guard a million dollars' worth of ore.

Miguel Milta had been the right-hand man of one of those bandits whom the new Government, not being able to catch, had pardoned. While the uncaught bandits

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roamed about—any one of whom might be the next Governor of Chihuahua, if not President of the country—the company had thought it right and proper to keep Miguel on the pay-roll.

However, the directors, having read in the papers that peace was established in Mexico, met in the seventeenth story of a building on lower Broadway and voted Miguel a blackmailer.

They decided that it was un-American to pay out money to a Mexican cutthroat. Besides, hadn't he promised the new Government to be gentle and harmless?

He had, so the papers said.

III

OUR superintendent had a daughter. She was blue-eyed, black-haired and motherless. Her name was Madge.

Madge was almost sixteen; whether a little over or under I am not sure; but she had never been able to practise the arts of flappering on any but a few big-boned rough-necks who thought she was just a child. You can't flirt with anybody who thinks that you still play with paper dolls. But it wasn't dolls that Madge cut out of *Vain Folk* and *Social Society*. It was studies in hair-dressing, poses, gowns.

Superintendent Ribling had stood off twenty-some Mexicans one moonlight night with his hand in an empty hip pocket and his hat-brim over one eye; but he could not do anything with Madge.

Confidentially, and with a good deal of pride, he would explain that she was like what her mother had been.

When Madge saw Terry Wade she took to him as a cat does to a catnip mouse. He didn't seem quite like a man, being so small and thin, with an odd, nervous eagerness to be agreeable.

She was used to fellows in high-topped boots; thick-chested fellows and, she said, thick-headed. But Terry Wade made a good toy.

Until he came she had been experimenting on Lem Hamlin, who was a sort of assistant superintendent, and certainly had troubles enough without discovering that Madge was almost marriageable.

Lem was big and serious-minded; and whenever you wanted to move him you had to get a requisition for blasting-powder, then tunnel under his feet.

Terry Wade was different, and to Madge a great novelty. He followed her around as if she had him on a string. She liked his strange patter. She liked his attentive eagerness; and, being a woman, she made fun of him to his face and stood up for him behind his back.

"Madge, you oughtn't to be going on so friendly with that fellow. I'm from New York, and I know his kind ain't no good. Nice girls don't go out riding with fellows they don't know nothing about; and I've sort of been an assistant father to you, Madge," said Lem Hamlin.

"Oh, you have?"

"Yes. And that Wade fellow ain't no good. I bet he had to leave the country. I bet he was a street-car conductor and stole nickels. You don't know how dishonest men are in a big city like New York."

"Well, at least, Lem Hamlin, he isn't stealing millions from the poor Mexicans for a lot of New York capitalists!"

"Now that's no way to talk. You know it ain't so. You've been listenin' to them agitators that try to make our peons quit. I don't understand about you, Madge. You ain't lady-like any more."

"Mr. Wade thinks I am. He says Flo Ziegfeld would give a million dollars for my outline."

"Did he say that to you!"

"You needn't blush, Lem. I didn't."

"Well I'll be dodgastedly bump-dingled," said Lem, and strode away to think it over.

Lem afterward told some of the boys that he bet this Flo Ziegfeld was a bad woman herself. Lem knew about as much of New York and its Follies as he did of the moon.

As for Terry Wade:

"Say, listen, lady. Youse got me goin'. I like youse, see? I seen all kinds, mostly the other kind. An' I takes me lid off to youse. I'm tellin' youse straight. I ain't no kidder."

"Are you trying to propose?" said Madge.

"Me? Now say, listen. Youse got me wrong. I don't do nothin' like dat—when youse been white to me? Naw. I ain't that kind. I don't t'row down me frien's. See?"

"Ho, then," said Madge, who really knew better than to play with dynamite, "you are going to let me marry some Mexican boy?"

"Youse hitch wid a wop?"

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"Wid a who?" said Madge.

"A wop. A guinea. Dago."

"Oh, you mean a greaser. Why not?"

"Your old man 'd cook him."

"My old man would *what?*"

"Cook him. Bump him off. Put 'im to sleep in de morgue. Get me?"

"No, Terry, I don't get you. You talk funny. Wouldn't you like to see me marry Miguel? Didn't you see all his gold braid? And that hat, Terry—it weighs five pounds. Miguel 's a brave man, too. Dad says that he has shot at least a hundred prisoners with his own hand. Miguel likes me."

Terry blinked doubtfully for a moment, then:

"Aw, dat guy, he ain't de goods. Naw."

"Don't you believe he isn't the goods. He got over a hundred thousand pesos the last three years out of the Xoxo Mining Company. Just handed to him, as dad says, on a platter to be good. His pay has stopped, and he will probably stop being good. Dad says he is sure to make trouble."

The big Miguel had ridden by a day or two before on a great horse, accompanied by three or four friends.

They looked to Terry Wade like guys coming out to do a roping act at the Hippodrome.

Miguel smiled broadly under his black mustache, gave a sweeping bow to Madge, a steady, insolent look at the diminutive Terry, who was perched uneasily on a pony; then he rode on, with belled spurs jingling and the light glancing from the ivory handles of his two revolvers.

Miguel was on his way to visit with the superintendent and to tell him smilingly that it was a great mistake for the Xoxo Mining Company not to guard its treasures.

"It's guarded, Miguel. It's sure guarded. Don't you go losin' weight worrying."

Miguel smiled thoughtfully.

"But, *señor*, so much that is not looked for can happen."

"Not around here it can't. We're always on the lookout for the unexpected. We sure are."

Miguel smiled with glistening teeth under a fringe of jet as he drew a cigaret, borrowed a match, gazed at the heavy sheet-iron buildings, then cast a glance up the mountainside toward the superintendent's house with its fortress-like thickness of wall.

In the most pleasant tones he bade good day and rode off.

"That ——'s sure got something in the fire. I guess we had better stand by for a raid," said Ribling to Lem Hamlin.

The assistant superintendent was not romantic. He worked too hard at many tasks to be thrilled by the picturesque Miguel's possible deviltry.

IV

THEN it happened—the unexpected that the genial Miguel had warned Ribling to look out for.

An Indian boy on a paint pony, bounding over the trail like a jackrabbit, came out from Pachuca with a letter to Ribling:

> *Señor*, I find the Treasure is not guarded so carefully as you think. For one hundred thousand pesos I will return her safely. If no money, then she dies.
>
> MIGUEL.

The Indian boy came near sharing the traditional fate of those who bear bad news, for Ribling, Lem Hamlin and two or three more backed him up against the wall and pelted him with questions.

Madge and Terry Wade that morning had ridden into Pachuca.

"Oh, I told her not to go!" said Ribling.

"I bet that no-good Wade played right into Miguel's hand on purpose. I didn't like that fellow from the first. I didn't even think he was funny!" Lem Hamlin was emphatic.

The Indian boy was almost as ignorant as he pretended to be. He said that Madge and Terry Wade had gone into the Gran Sociedad; then Miguel, who had been watching them, pulled this note from his pocket and told the boy to take it to Señor Ribling.

"Sent the note before he had Madge! That shows it was a frame-up!" said Lem. "That low-down New York loafer!"

Ribling was not saying anything. He simply stood with fist to chin, gazing at the ground. He could do nothing. He could not even pay unless he took the company's money—and the company would expect to be repaid at once, out of a salary of five thousand dollars a year.

It was not that which troubled Ribling. His daughter was in the hands of a Mexican desperado, one who could not be pursued; for Miguel was at home in hills and among cactus forests where his brother the rattlesnake would have got lost.

We all cursed Miguel and wished him

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buried under a mountain of hot coals; and there was a running to and fro after rifles.

"Put 'em up, boys," said Ribling. "He won't be standing round waiting for anybody to take a shot at him. Me an' Lem and Henry there will just ride into Pachuca an' get some line on what to do. I told her not to go to Pachuca today. I told her. I told her twicet."

"That's why she went then," said Lem. "That Wade fellow, he got her to go. I could tell from the looks of him that he wasn't any good. I warned her, too!"

When we got to Pachuca we found what had happened. The street in front of the Gran Sociedad was packed, and everybody was talking. But as we rode up they gave way with a sullen respect, and there were no cheers or shouted jibes from those well hidden in doorways. No hurrahs for Miguel. Something was wrong. It surely was.

Miguel, having seen Madge and Terry Wade enter the café to get a cup of chocolate, felt that the chance he had been watching out for was at hand; so he sent his note to Ribling by the Indian boy and followed them in the Gran Sociedad.

Miguel was accompanied by three men, all gaudy, all smiling, all armed.

Miguel swung a chair around and sat down at the table by Madge.

She stood up instantly and ordered him away. He laughed. The men with him laughed.

"Say listen. Youse guys beat it, see? Get me? Shove off."

Miguel turned and gave Terry a long, slow, amused look, then laughed. He said something to the men with him, and they laughed.

"What's the joke, lady? What's the joke? Why don't they talk English? What's the joke?"

"Terry, they are holding me for a ransom. There isn't any joke. Miguel's just said they are getting even because the mine has quit paying him, and that they are going to take me with them and keep me until he is paid! Oh, what shall I do!"

"Youse mean these wops are kidnaping youse?"

"That's it, Terry. Oh, I wish——"

Madge never finished her wish. There was no reason to.

Quicker than a wink an automatic had materialized in one of Terry Wade's thin, soft hands, and with the gangster's lack of warning he started shooting. He laced a pair of bullets into Miguel's heart before that desperado had even begun to reach for his white-handled guns—with which he had slain a hundred or more people, mostly those with their hands tied behind them. He put a bullet into two of the other men, and emptied his gun at the third, who went with zigzagging bounds for the door.

Then a second automatic appeared, and he blazed away at the door by way of discouraging interference. He swung Madge around, and half-dragged her into the alcove.

"Now, lady, youse jus' lay low. When the cop comes I'll stand for the collar, see? Dis 'll be an easy pinch to beat.

"Well, what's the matter wid the bulls in this man's town? Why don't they show? Say listen. In N'York youse 'd had the resoives down on youse by dis time.

"I told youse that bird wasn't the goods. He had a nerve, though, tryin' to kidnap yousé when youse was wid a frien'. Youse sure been white to me, you an' youse father.

"Why don't de bulls show?"

The Gran Sociedad was empty and quiet. No one tried to enter. Outside in the street a crowd gathered and hummed with babble. Terry Wade, gun in hand, leaned against the corner of the alcove and waited.

The alcove was lighted by a window, a grilled window let into the wall about eight feet from the ground.

A shadow suddenly appeared on this window. Madge screamed, and Terry wheeled, but too late. The gun that had been thrust in between the window's bars roared; and Terry Wade dropped.

The shadow fell from the window and moved off through the crowd, which gave way with smiles and words of praise. The brave Miguel had been avenged by a hand as brave as his own.

"Say listen. It's all right, lady. I'm t'rough. I ain't down here for me health. Dat was a stall, see? An' to t'ink a wop got me when some real guys in the big town didn't want none o' my game! Life's funny dat way. I'm sure glad I knowed youse, lady. It's been wort' it. An' now it's me for the Big Sleep an' a bed what don't creak."

Such was the passing of Terry Wade.

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The NINE UNKNOWN

by TALBOT MUNDY

A Five-Part Story—Part III

Author of "Benefit of Doubt," "Treason," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

THE Rev. Father Cyprian aims at Hindu occultism. He regards it as the machinery of Satan, to be destroyed accordingly. It was for that reason that he gave King, Grim, Ramsden and the others, access to books that no human eye should have seen.

There are other books which contain all the wisdom and secrets of the Nine Unknown, a mysterious order of India, and Father Cyprian wanted those books.

The Portuguese, da Gama, after the "whisky torture" and the threats of Ali ben Ali—he "cuts with an outward thrust"—agreed to give up certain books he had.

But, doubting the Portuguese's good faith, the seven sons of Ali were appointed to follow him.

The others went to the Star of India, a hotel kept by Diomed Braganza. A search of da Gama's room revealed the fact that it had been recently raided.

Going up on the roof they were joined by Ali.

Ramsden innocently insulted the Afghan and the two came to blows. The fight ended with their swearing eternal friendship.

"Together thou and I will beard the Nine Unknown," Ali boasted. "We will——"

But he was interrupted.

Ali's seven sons arrived and confessed that they had failed to keep in touch with da Gama. Six of them blamed the seventh for their failure.

"Beat him," said Ali.

And they did.

But the noise and disturbance of the beating aroused the anger of all the roof-top dwellers and shouts of, "They are spies! They are Government agents! *Bande Materam*" were answered by the shouts of Ali and his brood.

Then, when the fighting was at its fiercest came another cry—

"Fire!"

The smoke billowed upward and screams arose from the people jammed in the stair-head.

Escaping from this death-trap, they went to the house of Gauri, a woman who was known to be in the confidence of da Gama. She agreed to lead them to a place where he might be found.

And in an old deserted temple, underneath a pile of débris, they found da Gama.

There was no explanation of how he had died. There was no wound—no smell of acid poison—no snake-bite—nothing but a corpse with a scarred chin, smiling!

RETURNING with the bad news to Father Cyprian—leaving the sons of Ali to keep watch outside—they surprized Manoel, the butler, eavesdropping. At the same time word came that the sons had disappeared.

"Allah! My sons gone?" cried Ali, and all save Grim and Cyprian trooped after Ali to the rescue.

Now this is what had happened to the six:

Diomed, seeing them waiting outside the house, recognized them as the men who had caused the disturbance at his hotel, and ordered a constable to arrest them.

Seeing a man in a yellow garment beckoning them, the six ran off, and the constable—reasoning that if six, accused of arson, escaped under cover of the seventh's abuse, then the seventh must be guiltier than all!—arrested Diomed and took him to prison.

And so they all came to the police station. The yellow man and Ali's sons; the constable and his prisoner; Narayan Singh, Ali, Jeremy and Ramsden.

The yellow man had cunningly led the six there in order to proffer false charges against them. But Jeremy defeated his plan; the yellow man was arrested and put in the cell already occupied by Diomed, and three of Ali's sons were put there also—held as material witnesses.

In the mean time Grim had succeeded in getting a confession from Manoel, Cyprian's treacherous butler. He had been hired by the Nine to steal Father Cyprian's books. And then entered three men dressed in yellow smocks. One carried a long

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silk handkerchief in his right hand. Grim stepped back instead of forward—his blood chilled. Except for Grim's activity there had hardly been a motion visible and yet—the handkerchief had changed hands. The executioner had missed.

"My hour is not yet," Grim assured them.

"We want all of your books," said one of the yellow men.

"I win," Grim exclaimed suddenly. "Put up your hands, please."

They obeyed.

"We are not afraid," said one. "Others come."

"Yes, others come," said Grim and, as he spoke, the door burst open and Ramsden led the rest into the room.

And then a deadly gas filled the room.

"It is magic," screamed Chullunder Ghose. "It is unconquerable! It is death!"

The three yellow men were thrust down a cellar, and the babu kicked the handkerchief from which emanated the deadly gas, down among them. And the trap door was closed.

But the gas had already got in its deadly work. Narayan Singh and Father Cyprian collapsed. A little later the babu keeled over too.

Meanwhile, in the prison cell the three sons of Ali, deciding that the yellow man was the cause of their incarceration, killed him. And then came three other yellow men who killed Diomed and ordered the prison guard to release the men of the North.

This was done and one of the yellow men, first warning them that the time would come when they must pay for the service rendered, bade them depart.

And so, somewhat mystified, the three came to Cyprian's.

The old man was in a bad way. So too was Narayan Singh. It occurred to King that the three yellow men in the cellar would have an antidote to the poison, and Ramsden opened the trap-door in order to question them.

He found that they had set fire to all the books which had been stored there and, in the ensuing fight, two of the yellow men were killed.

"Take Cyprian somewhere and get a good doctor for him," Grim ordered. "Ali, you and your sons guard the prisoner until we find a good place to hide him."

CHAPTER X

"Can't hatch a chicken from a glass egg."

THAT night there stood in front of Cyprian's an ox-cart, tented and painted to resemble the equipage of old-fashioned country gentry's womenfolk. Chullunder Ghose had conjured the thing from somewhere, magnificent Guzerati bullocks included, selecting the form of conveyance least likely to be interfered with by police.

But to make assurance on that ground doubly sure there was Narayan Singh as driver, naked of leg and otherwise garbed as a Hindu, reenforced by Ramsden and two of Ali's sons, the latter shaven, and so angry at having to adopt Hindu disguise that it would have called for a whole squad of "constabeels" to arrest them.

Directed by Ramsden the corpses of the two followers of Kali were laboriously trundled by the oxen as far as possible in the direction of the scene of da Gama's death, and thence carried by Ali's protesting sons, who dumped them naked into the débris where the Portuguese had lain, and rolled the same broken pillar over both of them that once had helped to hide da Gama's remains.

Judged as corpses they would have looked a lot more edifying in the orange-yellow smocks they wore in life, but smocks, dyed just that color, are not purchasable in the open market. Thrift is thrift—the careful use of opportunity.

In another part of Delhi a more dangerous negotiation was proceeding, rendered no easier by the almost unconquerable yearning to fall asleep that was the natural consequence of two nights' wakefulness in Punjab heat.

It was Jeremy's proposal. Grim had seconded. King demurred. Chullunder Ghose had so squealed and chuckled with approval, vowing the whole proposal a stroke of genius "better than the gods could think of," that King gave in.

They drove the still unconscious Cyprian, wrapped in a blanket, to Gauri's house and lodged him there—a member of an order of strict celibates, in the house of a lady of Rahab's trade!

"What's the odds? He doesn't know it," argued Jeremy.

The lady was over ears and eyes in delicious responsibility—intrigued until her fat ribs shook with giggling—unaware of the patient's identity, for they had put him into a nightshirt, but as sure as that the stars were shining, that life—her life as she loved it—was being lived.

"If you hold your tongue you shall have for yourself one full share, equal to that of each of us, in whatever we discover," Grim explained to her.

"But let one hint drop, and you eat my knife!" said Ali. And Gauri believed both of them.

In all lands where the laws are written for the benefit of privilege there are smugglers—not only of contraband jewels and

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rum, but of contraband knowledge and skill. There are men, who belong to no certified profession, who can do as well for you in the way of experience, and at half the price, as any blockade runner can in the matter of lace or tobacco. No license confers skill, any more than payment of the duty improves art. Many a doctor, barricaded from or pitched out neck and crop from his profession knows more than the exclusive orthodox. But he has to follow Aesculapius and Galen in peril of imprisonment and fine. That is the point. He must not talk.

None knew, and none cared, why Doctor Cornelius MacBarron might not any longer use the title legally that his patients conferred on him gratefully, whether the law approved or not. For one thing he was an Eurasian—fifty-fifty—Caledonian Light Infantry on one side, and a dark mamma—no sinecure to go through life with. So he might not choose. What people said to or concerning him he had to tolerate, extracting now and then advertisement, more profitable than solacing, from the scandalous—even if merited—slanders of the regular professionals.

It was bruited abroad in Delhi—behind the drug-store counters, and in mess-rooms, and elsewhere—that at absurdly reasonable prices Cornelius MacBarron would cure anything—and what's more, hold his peace. He was said to have quite a wide following, and to know more secrets than a banker.

Whatever he knew, and whomever he recognized, he said nothing when brought in a cab in broad daylight to the Gauri's scandalous abode. With the long, lantern jaws and raw bones of a Scotsman, sad brown eyes, an unenthusiastic presence and a sallow skin, he did not seem to invite conversation or curiosity. Rather he repelled both.

"There's your man," said Jeremy, showing him Cyprian in Gauri's scented bed. "Cure him if you can."

MacBarron did not ask, "Who is he?" but "Is he hurt?"

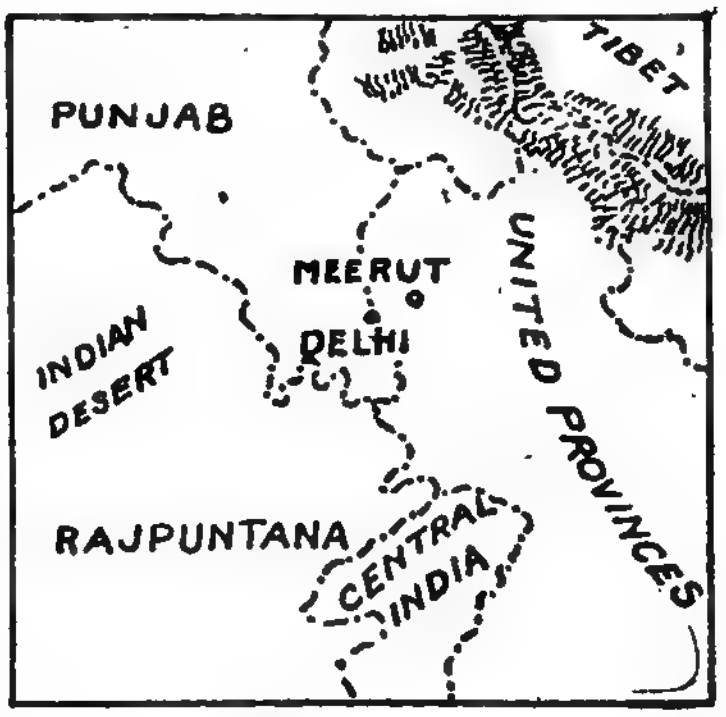
"No. Sick. Old. That's all," answered Jeremy.

"My fee will be fifty rupees—per visit," MacBarron announced, as if saying his prayers.

Jeremy produced the money. MacBarron folded it, and spoke again—

"Leave me alone with him, please."

Whereat Jeremy demurred, but was overruled by the others, who conceded, under the inspiration of Chullunder Ghose, that



it was reasonable. A man without the right to practise has excuse for dispensing with witnesses.

MacBarron emerged from the bedroom about fifteen minutes later and announced, like a verger opening pews, that in his opinion the patient would recover.

"He must lie still. Here is a prescription. Let him drink it as often as he will. You may pay me now for a second visit; that is wiser."

So they paid him, and he was on his way to the waiting cab when King detained him.

"Not so swiftly! We've another job. Do you mind walking?"

Barron minded nothing if he was paid. King led him through narrow streets to a place where three alleys came together on the right-hand side and a high wall on the left with a narrow door in it concealed the lower story of a minaret, whose mosque had long since succumbed to the ravages of time.

The door opened when King struck three blows on it, and Ali's dark face appeared in a challenging scrutiny.

"He groans much, but says nothing at all," Ali announced abruptly, and turned his back to lead them in.

The minaret was Ali's good provision. *Wakf*, the system of Moslem endowments for charitable purposes, is as liable to abuse as any other human scheme for

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standing off the evil day. Ali's blood-brother, having lent his sword in a blood-feud to which a wealthy merchant in the Chandni Chowk was party, was now in receipt of a comfortable income and the job of muezzin to a minaret without a mosque. In theory he was supposed to cry the summons to prayer at the appointed times, but in practise he was neither seen nor heard, lest busybodies should inquire into the source of his revenue.

Naturally, no man with a sinecure like that would be willing to share it for nothing. He demanded hotel prices, and was indignant when Ali withheld ten per cent. as his own commission. But the virtue of him was that he was just as much bent on secrecy as any one, and the watch he kept in consequence was priceless. Even after Ali had admitted King and MacBarron within the wall Ali's brother examined them and grumbled at having to entertain half Delhi.

"Is this a *Salleevayshun-armee-khana?*" he demanded.

KING led MacBarron by the winding inner stair to a room at the top of the minaret, where the muezzin was supposed to sleep, and whence the now decrepit gallery was reached by a narrow door in the masonry. The door was closed, and such light as was available came through a six-inch slit in the wall, for Ali's brother would permit no artificial light for fear of attracting attention.

On a truck bed in the darkest part of the round room lay the sole survivor of the three who had burned Cyprian's books. The whites of his eyes gleamed in darkness, but the rest of him was nearly invisible, for they had taken his yellow robe away, and his coppery, dry skin was of a shade that nearly matched the gloom. It was too hot to endure blankets.

MacBarron glanced at him, and then at King without visible emotion.

"My fee will be a thousand rupees," he announced.

"Check do?"

"Cash."

King was obliged to return and obtain the money from Grim. That took time, because Grim had to send a messenger to cash his check. When King reached the minaret again the prisoner's leg was already in plaster of Paris brought by Ali from a Goanese apothecary's, and the wrist was being manipulated in spite of the Hindu's protests. They had tied him to the bed; there was no other way of controlling him. The only thing he had not done to make trouble for them was to cry aloud.

"That arm must come off," announced MacBarron five minutes after King's return. "The reason is this——"

He went into details, deeply technical, displaying the same fearlessness in diagnosis that an engineer does when ordering parts of a locomotive scrapped. His objection to witnesses had vanished, for it was obvious that none of this secretive batch of clients would dare to expose him; and he had sufficient sense for situations not to ask the prisoner's permission. The whole conversation was in English until he bent over the bed at last and, looking straight into the victim's eyes, said curtly in Punjabi—

"Your arm must come off at the elbow."

That produced speech at last—coppery, resonant argument all mixed with threats intended to convey one point of principle: Anything—anything went; they might burn him living; he would not resist. But he would enter whole into the next world, with his right wrist fit for Kali's service! If they sought to take his arm off he would work a vengeance on them! If they did not believe that, let them take the first step!

"Hocus-pocus!" said MacBarron, not particularly *sotto voce*.

"Is the leg all right?" King asked him.

"It is set. It will heal. He will limp."

"Good enough. Please come again this evening," said King.

"To cut the arm off? Very well. That is two visits in twenty-four hours. Two hundred rupees extra. In advance."

King paid him, and he went.

"By Allah, we of Sikunderam, who think we will plunder India when the British go, must first take lessons from that man!" remarked Ali.

"Go below and keep watch!" ordered King, and in a minute he and the prisoner were alone together, looking in each other's eyes.

"Want to lose your arm?"

The man grinned in agony. The grin was half-grimace, but there was defiance and even amusement there.

"The arm that knows the trick of the handkerchief—the killing arm?"

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King put as much cruelty and mockery as he could summon into his voice.

But the trouble was that King knew well how far in the worst extremity he would be willing to go. And what was strength of character, too manly to take full advantage of helplessness even for any reward, the other could read but could not understand. He misinterpreted it as weakness—fear. Whereas about the only fear King has (and that unspoken—secret—sacred in his inner-being) is that he may not in some crisis quit himself as if all the decent fellows in the world were looking on.

"Will you amputate?" asked the Hindu, pointing to the injured wrist with his other hand and grinning again. He had feared MacBarron. He was no more afraid of King than a priest fears policemen. And the worst of it was that King knew well, that whatever power this fellow might have of summoning assistance without the use of obvious means, he would not use it except in absolute, dire necessity.

There is no rule more strict than that, probably because the penalty for breach of it is unimaginably awful. Radio is a joke, a mere clumsy subterfuge, compared to the gift some Indians have of communicating with one another across great distances. Every man who has the least acquaintance with the East knows that. But they don't give up their secret even in extremity, or use it without unquestionable reason.

It was possible that he might tell secrets under the torture and fear of amputation. But King was not morally capable of doing that. Instead he tried bribery—a bargain he would have said.

"Keep your arm and join us. You may have one full share in any discovery we make."

The man laughed genuinely—just as copper-voiced as he was copper-skinned. It was as if some devil in an unseen world had reached over and struck a gong in this one—three rising notes and then the overtones, all mockery.

King laughed too, on a descending scale. He appreciated—what few from the Western Hemisphere can realize—that money, a material reward, or any of the compensations that the West deems valuable have no weight whatever in the calculations of the thinking East. The politicians and a few of the *bunnia* class have swapped old lamps for new, but at the very mention of western money or wisdom the old East laughs. She can afford to.

"All right," King said. "Where are we then?" He turned his face away deliberately, as if discouraged. "If I can't overcome you, what do you propose to do with me?"

He gave the man time to consider that, then met his eyes again—objective-thinking Anglo-Saxon challenging the East that thinks subjectively or not at all. Neither could pierce the other's veil.

"You are no use," said the Hindu, letting his head fall back on the folded blanket that served for pillow. His eyes were alight with fever.

In spite of the intolerable heat King made sure that the door leading out to the gallery was locked, for whoever dares set limits to the capacity of esoteric India is likely to find himself surprized. Then he left him, giving orders below to keep on the *qui vive* and not to give the prisoner water or information. He would let the man torture himself for a while and lift his own veil in his own way.

And presently at Gauri's house, superintended and giggled over by Gauri and her maid, King, Grim and Jeremy put on the three orange-yellow smocks that had been the garb of the enemy, coppering their skins with some compound of vegetable greases that Gauri procured for them, and changing every expression of their faces until Gauri and the rest pronounced them perfect strangers. Then Grim and Jeremy submitted to King's drill, which was exasperating in insistence on minutest details, Gauri prompting him.

"Do you think you could manipulate a handkerchief the way you saw it done?" King asked, tossing one of Gauri's long silk scarfs to Jeremy.

He imitated perfectly the swift, apparently effortless pass from hand to hand. There is nothing that Jeremy can't imitate. Nothing was lacking except the will to kill by strangling, the victim, and the secret of how it is done.

"Can't hatch a chicken from a glass egg," he said apologetically. "I'm safe until I thug somebody."

King was insatiable—drilling, drilling, making them repeat all manner of proposed behavior in emergency, until they struck at last from very weariness, and Gauri

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brought cooling drinks and comfort in the shape of flattery.

"Perfect!" she told them.

"Nevertheless, this deferential babu, like wholesale tiger smelling traps invariably, would better accompany this expedition," said Chullunder Ghose. "Obesity is only disadvantage—curiosity impelling—adipose impeding—striking happy medium at all times——"

"You be still!" commanded King.

"Certainly, *sahib!* I desist! Am silent! Sublime satisfaction in service of noblemen makes obedient babu dumb! Your humble servant. Mum's the word, like Yankee skirmisher in No Man's Land! Nevertheless——"

He paused, looking up under lowered eyelids like a meek, ridiculous, fat schoolgirl.

Grim recognized the reference to a Yankee skirmisher as an appeal to himself. "Spill it!" he ordered. "Be quick."

"Silence being self-imposed on all three *sahibs*, somebody should come along to scintillate with clever verbiage. Self being otherwise unoccupied——"

"Whatever you said would give the game away," Grim interrupted severely.

"Even secret hymn to goddess Kali?"

He entoned it, throwing out his chest and making a pig's snout of his fat lips around the lower bass notes, that rumble and roll like the voice of the underworld glorifying in destruction, making of cruelty, death and disease sweet satisfactions for the dreadful bride of Siva. Few ever heard that hymn who were not initiates of Kali's dreadful cult, or——

"Were you ever held for the sacrifice?" King asked him suddenly.

"*Sahib*, I am superstitious! Reference to secret details of risky past might cause repetition of same, which decency forbid! Am dumb!"

He would not tell how he had learned that hymn. He knew the value of it, and of silence. He was indispensable.

"No extra charge!" he anounced with pursed lips.

"One break and you're fired!" said Grim.

"One break and we are all dead!" he retorted. "Awful! Yet—at my age—nevertheless—how many last chances I have had! Cat-o'-nine tails is rank outsider compared to most of us! Whoever boasted of dying daily had me in mind. *Verb. sap.*"

They waited until long after dark, when Ramsden reported the safe disposal of two corpses, and was detailed to take care of Cyprian.

"Tell him he's in the house of an Indian gentleman, whose wife can't very well interview him in her husband's absence," Grim advised. "Say his own place was full of gas, so we had to lock it up. If he asks any more questions, tell him the doctor says he must sleep."

Narayan Singh was told off to await the doctor. Then the three, Chullunder Ghose following, set forth on what was actually a forlorn hope.

"Pray, you men!" said King, half-laughing. "If we can't get an inside track to the Nine through this man, we may as well admit defeat. He's dry—full of fever—in pain—half-conscious. We can fool him now or never."

They could almost fool themselves. Their shadows on the street wall so resembled the parts they played that they had the sensation of being followed by assassins, the heavy footsteps of Chullunder assisting the suggestion.

They totally fooled Ali of Sikunderam and his suspicious brother. Ali thrust his long knife through the partly opened door in the wall and threatened to disembowel the lot of them unless they made themselves scarce.

"By Allah, shall a Hindu set foot on the sacred threshold of a mosque?" he demanded, as the rightful keeper of the place shifted a lantern this way and that behind him to expose the intruders better.

The voice of Chullunder Ghose was revelation—impiously making use of holy writ from the shadows in the rear:

"And they came unto their own, but their own received them not. Even in A. D. seventy they knew the nature of Sikunderam! Give sop to Cerberus, *sahibs!* Price of admission is payable in Beehive brandy!"

"I knew it all along!" said Ali with a curt laugh.

"Aye, any fool would know it!" his brother agreed.

"Open the door then, fools!"

CHULLUNDER GHOSE waddled in first, pushing aside the two custodians, bowing in his three employers, retiring again behind them to hold up both hands like the leader of an orchestra

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directing *pianissimo*. Thereafter not a word was said.

In creaking, bat-winged darkness they four mounted the minaret stairs, pausing each half-dozen steps to listen for sounds from above. Chullunder Ghose, holding a flask of water destined for the prisoner's use when he should acquire the right to it by bargain, stopped on the rickety floor below the upper room and sat, cross-legged, with his face toward the opening through which the other three must pass—a square hole at the stair-head. Low sounds—human speech assuredly—emerged through it, using some other than the ordinary language of the streets.

The words ceased as King in the lead reached midway up the last flight of stairs. A face appeared in the opening—coppery even in that dim gloom—a new face, not the prisoner's. King, never hesitating, took the next step and the others followed. A word would have betrayed them. A fluttering nerve in the presence of the unexpected would have added hesitation to the cue. But even the babu—he particularly—rose to the heights of instant self-command.

A stanza of the hymn to Kali rose from the babu's throat like a burst of faraway organ music, and the face in the opening withdrew. King went on up. He had not hesitated. He was not lost.

Keeping step, not hurrying, not looking to the right or left but purposely moving like men in a dream, the other two followed him through and sat down alongside him in the attitude the three book-burners had taken on Cyprian's yak-hair carpet, Jeremy at one end.

The owner of the unexpected face thrust his hand against the door that led to the gallery, letting in sufficient star-light to reveal the orange-yellow of his long smock. Then he sat down facing them, with his back to the wall by the head of the bed.

He said something, using a language that is dead—extinct—that never did exist according to some authorities. Instead of attempting to answer, all three bowed low from the waist with their hands palms-outward, like temple images come to life. And again Chullunder Ghose's gorgeous barytone burst forth in praise of death.

There is this about ancient mysteries. Nine-tenths of them, if not more, are forgotten and the words a generation passes to the next one—"mouth to ear and the word at low breath"—if not substitutes are no more than a fragment of lost knowledge. He who had spoken in perhaps the mother-tongue of lost Atlantis was content to carry on in Punjabi.

"Ye heard his call, too? Brothers, ye were awake! I came up the outside and broke the lock with a chisel. Ye were cleverer! Ye did not slay, for I hear the voices of the guards down-stairs. Ye did well. Are there orders? Ye are not of my Nine, for ye make no answer to the signal."

Speech was impossible. Their one chance was to pretend to a vow of silence, such as *fakirs* often take. Instead of speaking Jeremy flicked the handkerchief from one hand to the other with the diabolical, suggestive swiftness of a past-practitioner of Thugee.

The man by the head of the bed betrayed astonishment—maybe disgust.

"By whose order should he die?" he demanded. "I have tested him according to rule. He has not betrayed. His failure is not complete. He—they—two of them are dead—burned all the books because they could take none. This one sent the Silent Call to give us information. He deserves life."

He paused for an answer. And the first sign having succeeded, Jeremy repeated it—as an executioner whose patience was exhaustible.

Promptly, as if they had rehearsed that very combination, Chullunder Ghose sang of the death that is Kali's life, and his voice boomed through the opening in praise of pain that is Kali's ease—and of Want that is her affluence.

That tide in the affairs of men that Shakespeare sang was surely at flood that night! It brimmed the dyke. He by the head of the bed was aware of it, restlessly.

"The Nines are no longer interlocked as formerly," he grumbled. "One Nine has an order that another counteracts. There is confusion. There is too much slaying to hide clumsiness. Our plan was patterned on the true plan of the Nine Unknown, but we are a bad smell compared to their breath of roses! They know, and are Unknown. We do not know, and too many know of us."

A thrill that commenced with King and passed through Grim reached Jeremy, but none of them confessed to it. They sat still, expressionless, three bronze faces

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staring straight forward, only Jeremy's fingers moving in the overture to death. The long silk handkerchief flicked back and forth like a thread in the loom of the Fates.

The man on the bed groaned dismally, and as if that were a signal for the bursting of the dyke that stood between ignorance and understanding—for there always is a dyke between the two, and always a weak point where the dyke will yield if men can only find it—he by the head of the bed called up from his inner-man the lees of long-ago forgotten manliness. Then not in anger, but calmly as became a follower of the Destroyer's Wife, he cast his ultimatum at the three.

"I, who shall be slain for saying this, yet say this. Listen, ye! Dumb be the spirit in you as the lips your vow has sealed! This man, whom ye have come to kill because he failed, lest failure be a cause of danger to worse devils than ourselves—is my friend!"

He paused, appearing to expect some sign of astonishment. Friendship is treason to Kali. Comment was due, and Chullunder Ghose obliged, hymning new stanzas in praise of Her who annihilates.

"This man once spared me. I spare him. Ye shall not sacrifice him. Hear me! I came, not knowing who he was. Ye came, knowing. Your orders are to kill *him*. Mine are to go to Benares and slay one *said* to be a true Initiate of the Nine. But I am weary of all this. Ye *shall* not slay; I *will* not—unless——"

He paused again, making no motion with his hands. But he left no doubt there was a weapon within reach with which the argument might be continued if convenient to all concerned Jeremy's hands moved, but only to manipulate the handkerchief. He, Grim and King all had pistols, so no need for hurry. King broke silence, sparing words like one who mistrusts speech—

"We three have grown so weary of it all that a watch was set on us, lest we fail."

Confirming that, Chullunder Ghose's barytone hymned one more stanza to the Queen of Death. The man on the bed groaned wearily. In the street the sound of revelry—the last verse of a drunkard's love-song—announced and disguised the news that Narayan Singh had arrived on the scene with the doctor.

"If there is only one who watches you, is there any reason why we four should fear him?" asked the man by the head of the bed.

That sounded like a trap. In dealing with the secret brotherhoods it is safe to suspect that every other question is asked for precaution's sake. The wrong answer would be an astringent, drying up confidence at the source.

"So be *one* died—" said King, not daring yet to speak openly, because he did not know the key-phrases that identify man to man.

The other nodded.

"I am not an executioner," he said. "Let your brother use his skill."

And he nodded suggestively at Jeremy. The man on the bed groaned again. Chullunder Ghose was absolutely still. From below came Narayan Singh's carousal song and the voices of Ali and his brother commanding silence in the name of decency.

It began to be clear to King that his suspicion was accurate—that the members of one Nine did not know the members of any other Nine and had no means of challenging. Each Nine reported to its chief, who in turn was one of nine. That was what da Gama said, and though the Portuguese was not to be believed without deliberation, even deliberation must have limits. King took the chance.

"I have no means of testing you," he said. "You do not respond to my signs."

"Nor you to mine, brother! Let us then give pledges satisfactory to each."

"If we let this fellow live," King answered, and paused, observing that the man by the head of the bed pricked his ears.

He remembered that as Kali's follower he must not offer to deprive the goddess altogether of her prey. There must be a substitute.

"Will you betray the Initiate of the Nine to us in Benares, in order that we may not fail to make Her a sacrifice?

"No!" came the answer—abrupt and firm. "Substitute him who sings to Her below there!"

It was time for heroic measures. Insofar as reason applies to murder, he was reasonable. And besides, King was aware of a sound in the outer darkness that Chullunder Ghose heard too, for the bábu sang to drown it.

"I believe you are an impostor! I

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believe you know nothing of Benares! I believe you are that faithless member of another Nine whom we were told to watch for! If there should be a substitute I think that thou——"

King pointed an accusing finger at him. Jeremy made the handkerchief perform like a living thing. It even looked hungry.

"Nay, nay!" said the other.

"Show me proofs!" said King.

The subtle noises in the night had ceased and there was now no cause for hurry. It was almost possible to see—as one could sense—the pallor on his face as the man by the head of the bed reached out to push the door a little wider open and admit more starlight. Whatever his weapon was, he had to see clearly to use it. As his wrist reached out across the opening a huge hand closed on it—from outside.

It was no use screaming, though the blood ran cold. The followers of Kali train themselves to self-control. It was no use moving, because two repeating pistols, King's and Grim's, covered him.

He could not speak. Terror, the stronger for being suppressed, gripped him tighter than the unknown hand that held his wrist against the door-frame like material in a vise.

The door of the minaret below slammed suddenly, and one man was heard to enter. King felt the wheels of destiny turn once and drop the finished solution like a gift into his hand. Destiny had chosen the right man, and his assistants waited on him, saying nothing, offering no advice, not even glancing sidewise to observe him. It was apparent to the man by the head of the bed that they all three acted on instructions in accordance with a prearranged plan, that which is obvious being untrue nine times out of ten.

"You are he whom we should watch for," King said slowly. "There is talk of your sedition. That is why they sent you to Benares. That is why you were picked to sacrifice that true Initiate of the Holy Nine."

King paused and took another long chance. Had not the others acted in threes? "You were ordered to Benares, where two others should join you. You, who can not use the handkerchief, were to be decoy. We are they who should have met you in Benares! Yet you can no more tell which of us three are the two than you could escape from the task imposed on you!"

The man's jaw dropped. He believed himself taken in the toils of the relentless machine that owned him and a thousand others. There is no more paralyzing fear than that.

"You would have cheated HER!" said King.

He rose and made a sign to Grim and Jeremy that was not easy to mistake. They lifted the unconscious prisoner off the bed and, taking more care of his bandaged leg than was quite in keeping with the circumstances, carried him down through the opening in the floor. From below came the sound of one short strangling cry.

"Clumsy!" said King. "He lacks practise!"

Then there was whispering and the sound of a dead weight being carried down wooden stairs. The door below slammed. There was the noise of men's feet outside—then of wheels. First Grim returned, and then Jeremy. The expression on their faces was of great elation suppressed and crowded to the point of near-explosion.

"You will go to Benares. You will lead to the slaying him who was appointed for the sacrifice. You will be judged thereafter by the judges."

Some gesture that King made must have been visible from the outer-gallery, for the hand that held the wrist let go. The door was shut tight from without. In the ensuing darkness King descended, leaving Grim and Jeremy to guard the new prisoner, and Chullunder Ghose, holding both sides in silent laughter that made tears stream down his cheeks, motioned him toward the ground floor. Chullunder Ghose remained where he was, wallowing in exquisite emotion.

Narayan Singh, descending by broken masonry, groping for foothold, found his foot in King's hands and so reached *terra firma*.

"*Sahib*, it would seem the gods are with us! The doctor has a place where he can treat that patient better than in this tower. He and I brought a litter on wheels and men to push it. The babu signaled me that there were doings up-stairs, so I climbed by the broken masonry, knowing the value of surprize in an emergency! Shall the doctor amputate?"

"Tell him no," said King, "but keep him *incommunicado*."

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CHAPTER XI

"Allah! Do I live, and see such sons?"

THERE was a cellar below the minaret —a mere enclosure in between foundations, but no less practicable as a dungeon on that account. Therein they cached the prisoner with Narayan Singh and three of Ali's sons on guard, instructed not to show themselves to the man they guarded but to be as rabid wolves at bay toward all trespassers.

Then, because a good rule is to hold your conferences where not even friends expect you, King Grim and Jeremy went and sat like great owls in the shadow of a wall above a low roof several hundred yards away. There they could see one another and not be seen.

King met Grim's eyes. Grim met King's. The two spoke simultaneously—

"You were right!"

"Pop Cyprian won't believe it though!" laughed Jeremy, yawning. "Sleep under the stars, you blighters? Here goes then!"

He curled himself up, and was breathing like a kitten in a moment.

"There are two Nines!" King said with conviction.

"The real gang, and this Kali outfit!" Grim agreed.

"Right! But as Jeremy says, Cyprian won't believe it."

King faced toward Grim and as if playing cards they tossed deductions to and fro, each checking each. "One's good. The other's bad."

"The Kali outfit patterned their organization after the real Nine's, in the hope of stumbling on the secret."

"They've spotted a real Initiate of the Nine."

"Bet you! Maybe one of *the* Nine. Marked him down. Expect him in Benares."

"Told off this man-in-yellow to kill him."

"What for? *Qui bono?* Ring in one of their own thugs to pose as the dead man?"

"Probably. He might discover something before the remaining Eight get wise."

"But why pick a man who can't use the handkerchief, and whose loyalty must have been questionable?"

"Probably he's the only one who can identify the proposed victim."

"If so, they'll watch him."

"Which means they'll have watched him tonight!"

"Uh-huh. They must have seen him enter the minaret."

"Good thing we left Narayan Singh on guard."

"You bet—and those three sons of Ali's who were in trouble with the police. They'll fight like wolves at the drop of a hat.

"All nerves. Better than watch-dogs. What next?"

"Sleep!" said Grim.

And they did sleep—there on the roof, where none but the stars and the crescent moon could see them and only Chullunder Ghose knew where to track them down.

Chullunder Ghose slept too, hands over stomach and chin on breast, with the broad of his back set flat against a wall and his whole weight on the trap-door that provided access to the cellar—turban over one ear—so asleep that even minaret mice (hungrier than they who live in churches) nibbled the thick skin of his feet without awaking him.

The North—Sikunderam in particular—can sleep, too, when it has no guilty conscience; and it begins to measure guilt at about the deep degree, where squeamish folk leave off and lump the rest into one black category. None the less, although the sons of Ali yawned when Narayan Singh posted them around the iron-railed gallery, with orders to keep one another awake and summon him at the first sign of an intruder, yawning was as much as it amounted to. They sat like vultures on a ledge and listened to the Sikh's enormous snores that boomed in the waist of the minaret. (He calculated that the second floor, midway of either, was the key to the strategic situation.)

Nominally each of Ali's sons from where he sat could view a hemisphere, so that their vision actually overlapped. But in practise there was one whose outlook included a high, blank wall, over which it was humanly impossible for an enemy to approach, because there were spikes along the wall, and broken glass, and beyond it were the women's quarters of a much too married rajah.

So that one—Habibullah was his name—was more or less a free lance, able to reenforce the others or to spell them, without that extra loss of self-respect that might otherwise have attended desertion of a fixed

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post. Narayan Singh had said, "Sit here—and here—and here." But he had evidently meant "Divide the circle up between you." So Habibullah construed it, the the other two confirming; but it was an hour before anything happened. Then:

"One beckons," said Ormuzd—he facing due east. There was a roof in that direction on which the light from a half-shuttered upper window fell like a sheet of gold-leaf. "One sits like a frog in a pool and beckons. Come and see."

So Habibullah, having faced west long enough, changed his position and sat by Ormuzd.

"Huh! He beckons. Is his garment yellow, like that of him we slew in the jail, or does the light make it seem so?"

They watched with the infinite patience of Hillmen and all hunting animals, until the third brother came around to lend two eyes of flint—just one look and away again, back to his post.

"He beckons," he agreed.

"Does he beckon to us or—"

"To us!" said Habibullah. "Moreover, he *is* clothed in yellow. The light shows it. He is one of those who loosed us from the jail."

As if confirming Habibullah's words, the man on the roof in the pool of light raised up a Himalayan *tulwar*, shaped so exactly like the one that Ormuzd left in the police station that the two who saw it thrilled like women seeing a lost child. The northern knife is more than knife.

"What does he want with us, think you?"

"Go and see!"

"That drunken dog of a Sikh who snores within there will awake and——"

"Never mind him. Climb down by the broken edges of the stone. We have done worse many a time in *our* Hills."

But caution is as strong as curiosity in the mind of Sikunderam. No Highlander who followed Bonnie Charlie to his ruin was as hard to pin down to a course—or harder to turn from one, once on his way. Habibullah sat and weighed the pros and cons—including the likelihood that he in the pool of light might be a *shaitan*—until the other two cried shame on him. His reason in the end for going to investigate was fear that their loud arguing might wake Narayan Singh and that the Sikh might possibly claim all the credit for some discovery.

Hand over hand at last he went down the broken side of the minaret—leaped like a goat on to the street wall above the heads of Ali and his brother, who were sleeping the sleep of innocence in the shadow of the gate—and gained the street.

BUT none came to meet him, as he had half-hoped. He was left to his own devices to find a way up to the roof the man had beckoned from—not nearly as easy a feat as threading the bat-infested ledges of eternal hills. In one street an unwise "constabeel" presumed to demand what his business might be; whereat Habibullah ran for half-a-mile in zig-zags, never losing direction; and finally, by way of a stable and the iron roof of a place where they sold chickens, he climbed to a point of vantage whence he could look down from darkness into the pool of light.

"*His-s-s-s!*" he remarked then to attract attention.

And a second later his skin crawled like a sloughing snake's all up his spine and then down again.

The man in the pool of light took no notice, but another had leaned out of the darkness almost within arm's reach and, flashing a little electric torch, grinned straight into his face.

"You should go to him—go to him—he beckons, does he not? Go to him then!" he whispered.

The whisper was the worst part of it. If he had spoken out loud Habibullah would have tried a little bombast to reassure himself. As it was, the creepy sensation increased; nor was there any knowing how many other men there might be grinning at him from the darkness—grinning at him who had no knife! He could see one of his brothers—just a shadow motionless among the shadows of the minaret, and the sight made him lonelier than ever.

"Why wait for the handkerchief?" suggested the voice beside him; and that settled it; Habibullah leaped down on to the roof like a young bear, making all the noise he naturally could.

But the noise did not startle the man in yellow, who sat in the midst of the pool of light. It did not as much as annoy him. He smiled—a beastly, bronze, arrogant smile that chilled the blood of Habibullah worse than the other man's whisper had done.

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"You beckoned?" said Habibullah, forgetting that he who speaks first most often has the worst of it.

The other shifted himself out of the patch of light suddenly, and left Habibullah standing there.

"Did I beckon a fool for the police to shoot at?" he asked from behind a chimney. "Their nets are laid. The order is to seize all strangers from Sikunderam. You and your brothers are as sure of death as the fat sheep in the butcher's hands, unless—step this way out of the light, fool!"

Habibullah obeyed, and was sorry he obeyed, on general principles.

"Who are *you*?" he asked. He tried to make his voice sound truculent, but it was only desperate. He wished he had not come.

"You left the jail without asking who I am. Why ask now? Better obey me."

"In what respect?"

"In all respects!"

Obedience is a hard pill to force down the throat of a Hillman. The fact that he thought himself helpless did not sweeten the dose for Habibullah. The other was a Hindu, which made it worse. So he said nothing, as the only way he knew of nursing his disgust, and perhaps the man in yellow believed that silence signified assent, although perhaps not. He was wise in some ways. Nevertheless, he proceeded to display his ignorance.

"There are two men dressed like me in that minaret," he said.

"*Two* men?" said Ali, looking hard at him.

"*Two!*" he answered positively. "One is injured. One is whole. The whole one is at fault and the injured one has failed. Both die tonight. It is your business to admit three of us into the minaret."

"Mine?"

"Yours and your brother's."

"But— Bah! By Allah, what you ask is impossible! We are not alone there. There is a Sikh——"

"True. And a babu. Do they not sleep?"

"But there are others, who keep watch outside by the door in the wall."

"Aye, and *they* sleep, or how didst thou escape unseen? Kill them, too, and earn merit!"

Habibullah withdrew again into the silence, for emotion choked him. He could contemplate killing Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose with comparative calm, even while doubting that three of them could master the turbulent Sikh. But to murder in cold blood, without warning, Ali ben Ali of Sikunderam, sire, tutor, patron, paymaster, hero, bully and belligerent accomplice, was something that not even sons of the Hills could consider, say nothing of do. Hardly believing his ears he bridles speech, the slow, dour cunning of the mountains coming to his aid at last. The limit of amazement being reached—fear having worked its worst—he rose above both like a swimmer coming up for air.

"How much will you pay?" he demanded.

The man in yellow laughed—a conquering laugh all full of scorn and understanding.

"Rupees, a thousand!" he answered.

"Show me! Pay now!"

Habibullah stooped and held his hand out—mocking. He did not believe that man in yellow had a thousand rupees, certainly not that he would part with them. But the other produced a roll and counted the money out in hundreds:

"—eight, nine, ten!" he said, placing the lot in the Hillman's extended hand. "Blood-money! These are witnesses!"

He made a sound exactly like the hum of a bronze bell struck with a muted hammer. Instantly two faces, thrust forward into the light like disembodied phantoms, grinned at him.

"Go! Kill! And when you have killed set a lantern on the gallery of the minaret!"

Habibullah glanced down at the ten banknotes that his fingers closed on, and all the Hillman's yearning for the hardest bargain ever driven surged in his ambitious breast.

"How shall we slay without weapons?" he demanded. "The police had our *tulwars*——"

The man in yellow interrupted him by passing hilt-first the *tulwar* that he had used to signal with. It was not Habibullah's own. He raised it—possibly to glory in its balance as it quivered like something golden in the window-light—yet even so perhaps not; for the North is quick to use the unsheated argument.

He was aware of the click of an old-fashioned pistol in the dark not far behind him, so he lowered the *tulwar* again and thumped the edge of it. Concession had bred appetite:

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"We are three," he said. "We had three weapons—two more such as this."

"Aye," came the instant answer. "Thine and another's. That is not thine. That will be claimed by its owner. Thine and the other may be had for service rendered."

It was shrewd. No knight of the middle ages set a value on golden spurs one atom greater than the Hillman's superstitious reverence for his knife. With it he reckons himself a man; without it, something less, and so is reckoned.

Nevertheless, the greater the weight on one side of a bargain, the more determined should the haggling be. That is scripture. Habibullah cast about for an alternative and landed a good one at the first attempt.

"You say two yonder must die? My brothers and I might kill those, saving trouble with the Sikh, who is a man of mighty wrath, to kill whom would offend his masters. Better bind him while he sleeps, and tell him afterwards that others did it. Then kill the babu, who is useless and has the tongues of ten women. Whereafter slay—we three could slay—the *two* men you say are due to die tonight."

That was a long speech for Habibullah. It produced a profound impression and he struck an attitude while the two disembodied faces appeared in the shaft of light again and conversed with number one. They spoke a language he knew nothing of, and displayed skill in the use of light and shade that was beyond his understanding, for although he screwed his eyes, and dodged, he failed to see anything but faces; and in the end he began to be afraid again, more than half-believing number one was speaking with spirits of the air.

"Only the spirits don't use pistols," he argued to himself. And twice he heard the click of a pistol hammer as if some one in the dark were testing it, not nervously but as a warning. "I would like to lay this blade just once where the neck of that face should be!" he thought.

And some one seemed to read his thought, for a pistol in a hand unconnected with any evident body emerged into the light and warned him pointblank.

"We should have to see bodies of the slain," said number one at last in plain Punjabi; and the two faces vanished.

"All Delhi may see them for ought I care!" Habibullah answered, forgetting for the moment that there was only one prisoner in the cellar.

"So we should have to enter the minaret."

"Lo, I make you a gift of the minaret!" laughed Habibullah, growing bolder as he realized his point was gained. These were not such dangerous people after all. How his brothers would wonder when he regaled them with the account of his skillful bargaining!

"You will need to arrange for us to enter," said the man in yellow.

Habibullah was silent, scratching his young beard, pondering what that proviso meant.

"The guard at the gate must be slain," his interlocutor went on. And Habibullah's beard continued to be scratched, a row of milk-white teeth appearing in a gap in the black hair as his lower lip descended thoughtfully.

Strange arguments appeal to savage minds. The rock on which Habibullah's wit was chafing itself keen just then was not the stipulation to kill Ali of Sikunderam (for that was excluded—imponderable—abstract—not to be reckoned with, and having no weight)—but the puzzling, protruding, concrete circumstance that he in yellow did not dream of entering the minaret by any other way than the front door.

Could he not climb? Was he lazy, or afraid, or proud? What *was* the matter with him? No man, having murder in his mind and able to command the very captain of the jail, was worth taking seriously if he only thought in terms of front-doors! Habibullah knew exactly what to do now.

"There is no other way than to kill those who guard the gate," said he in yellow.

"No other way," Habibullah agreed. "I will do it."

"How will you let us know when the work is done and the gate is unlocked?" the other demanded.

"We will light a lantern and carry it thrice in a circle around the gallery. Then come swiftly, for we will open the door and wait for you; and we will tell the Sikh afterwards that it was you who bound him," said Habibullah.

He was not sure yet what he meant to do. But he was sure he would outwit the man in yellow, whom he thoroughly despised now, not fearing him even a little,

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so mercurial, albeit simple are the workings of the Hillman intellect. He had the man's money. Why should he fear him? Who feared fools? Not Habibullah! Father Ali should have reason to boast of one son this night!

Something of his thought exuded—emaanated—some vague aureole of ignorant conceit emerging under the cloak of pretended assent.

"Remember!" warned the man in yellow. "This is a part of the price to Kali, payable for your release from jail! There will be more to pay another time. And he who fails to pay Her the least particle of Her demand—is less to be envied than a woman dying as she bears a dead child!"

Habibullah shuddered, and recovered. He was not a woman, praise be Allah!

"It is time I go," he said abruptly, and in a moment he had swung himself down into the street along which he could see the "constabeel" vainly pursuing imaginary footsteps. He kept behind the "constabeel" and gained the minaret without accident. He was minded to beat on the door in the wall and swagger in triumphantly with all that story to relate and a thousand rupees to confirm it with. Only the suspicion that the man in yellow possibly could see him from the roof prevented.

He still did not know how the Hindu should be tricked. He knew that pocketing the money for a murder he had not the remotest intention of committing was only part of the business. They must be fooled to the full taste of Sikunderam, and none—no man on Allah's footstool—could do that half as well as Ali, father Ali, who was sleeping by his brother at the gate—father Ali, wiliness incarnate!

So he climbed the outer-wall like a bear in the hills, making much less noise than he normally did on level ground. And he dropped so lightly into shadow on the other side that Ali did not wake until the hot breath rustled in his ear.

"Look, father Ali! Look!"

HE HELD the money—all that money!—most incautiously in the rays of the hooded candle that bode in a crevice of the wall against emergency. Ali—waking—seized the money—naturally—even before he rubbed his eyes. It was in the hidden pocket under two shirts, and with a sheepskin jacket double-buttoned over all, before poor Habibullah could protest.

And then, in all the righteous wrath of an outraged sire, Ali ben Ali rose and cursed his son for daring to absent himself from post without permission!

"Allah! Do I live—and see such sons? The dung a pigeon drops on a ledge will stay there! Yet you leave! O less than ullage! Less than the stink of a debauch—for that clings! Son of all uncleanliness, get to thy perch again!"

So Habibullah went, for there was no gainsaying father Ali. He who had slain in seven duels the husbands of the mothers who had borne the sons he claimed, was not to be withstood by one son single-handed in the hour of rising wrath. The necessary element was speed, and Habibullah used it, shuddering as a new curse hounded his retreat.

Nor did he enter the minaret, for that would have been to awaken the babu and the Sikh too soon, before he—Habibullah—should have time to think. He climbed by the broken masonry again like a steeplejack, and swung himself up on the gallery between his wondering brothers.

"Mine!" said one of them, pouncing on the *tulwar*.

"You shall have it in exchange for mine!" said Habibullah, snatching it away. "Peace! Listen!" He had done his thinking. "Father Ali bade me say this: He will beat whichever of you leaves the gallery! He gave me other work to do."

Which untruth being loosed, and therefore off his conscience, Habibullah entered the minaret through the gallery door and descended the creaking stairs, after carefully fastening the door behind him lest his brothers overhear and make a hash of what should be a neat, nice piece of strategy.

He was angry with father Ali—not to the point of rebellion yet, but full of indignation and desirous of revenge. He was minded to take his information to a man who, all his faults considered, was a generous soldier of mettle and resource. The money was gone; but the chance for a creditable deed remained; and if his own brains were insufficient for the task, he knew where to find sufficient ones.

So he stooped over Narayan Singh and checked him in mid-snore. The Sikh seized his wrist and let go again.

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"The foe?" he demanded. "Trespassers?" (Whoever is not friend comes into Narayan Singh's category of "foe," to be dealt with accordingly.)

"Hus-s-s-sh!" warned Habibullah. "Let the babu not hear!"

"No! Let the babu sleep!" Chullunder Ghose called up from his seat on the hatch. "There is first the thunder and then these whisperings! My ——, for the gift of silence in these precincts! Oh well, oh very well, I come! Unfortunate babu is slave of circumstances in all things!"

He came waddling up the stairs, and struck a match so suddenly that Habibullah cursed him.

"Hillman's curse is Hindu's blessing!" said the babu piously. "Now spill the beans! Unleash the dogs of war and let speech coruscate! Give her gas!"

So Habibullah could not help himself. He was obliged to tell his tale to both men, neither of whom believed him because he could not show the thousand rupees that he boasted of having "lifted" from the man in yellow on the roof. In fact the whole tale was too fishy, coming on top, as it did, of that other yarn about fighting a way out from the police cells.

"That I should leave a virgin bed on a trap-door for this!" Chullunder Ghose sighed. "I lie, thou liest, he lies—what unregenerated Prussian calls *die Lust zum Fabulieren*! 'Gas!' I said, and he delivers hot air! Oh deliver me!"

"If you could prove a word of it—" Narayan Singh suggested sleepily—"I might believe the next word; and if that one were true I would credit a third, and so further. As it is, if you are not back in your place on the gallery within——"

But Habibullah was desperate, and desperation has resources of her own.

"What if I bring the three in yellow to the front gate? Will you help me slay them?" he interrupted.

"I would *like* to slay them," said Narayan Singh. "Whoever promenades the streets in yellow with the mark of Kali on his forehead ought to be severed between skull and shoulders. Go back to the gallery and keep watch! In the morning I will tell your father Ali to discourage lying with a thick stick!"

"Lend me a lantern. I will prove it to you!" said Habibullah.

Chullunder Ghose arranged his turban sleepily.

"Observe a symptom of *in vino veritas*," he remarked, "wine being possibly imagination in this instance. The savage believes what he says, even supposing same is untrue."

Narayan Singh rose with a sigh and discovered a lantern he had hidden where none else would find and adopt it. He lit it with blasphemy, burning his fingers, ordered the babu back with his fat hind-quarters on the trap-door, looked disgustedly at Habibullah, shook himself to make sure the weights were there that told of hidden weapons, and yawned.

"Forward! Up-stairs! Prove it! If you fail to prove it, over with you!"

Habibullah led the way. With the lantern in the skirts of his sheep-skin coat, lest the enemy catch sight of it before the stage was ready, he stepped out on the gallery, with the Sikh peering over his shoulder suspicious of tricks. Then he ordered his brothers inside, they protesting volubly, making a show of disinclination to desert the post. Narayan Singh was deeply edified.

"Dogs on a dung-hill are as noisy and as timid!" he said pleasantly. "Better kneel in there and pray for good sense—if Allah is listening! Now, show thy proof!"

He shoved Habibullah outward to the railing and was close behind, but Habibullah begged him to stay in the open door and watch the light streaming from a window over a roof some way in front of them; and still suspecting trickery the Sikh obliged. He could not stand upright, but bent forward with a hand on either post.

Then Habibullah, holding the lantern in his left hand, turned to the right and made the circuit of the gallery three times, swinging the lantern constantly to call attention to it. And when he had made the third circuit, as it were of the walls of Jericho, the light streaming from the window that Narayan Singh watched went out suddenly —yet not so suddenly as when one switches off the current. Some one invisible had held an obstacle between the window and the minaret. He lowered it, and the light streamed forth again.

They have seen. Now they will come to the gate to be slain!" said Habibullah. "And if you, *sahib*, wish to have the credit for it all, take my advice and climb down this way, not waking father Ali!"

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CHAPTER XII

"I am dead, but the silver cord is not yet cut."

GRIM nudged King. King jerked at Jeremy's flowing Arab headgear.

"Watch the minaret," Grim whispered.

The crescent moon had gone down. There was no light other than the glorious effulgence of the stars. The minaret—a phallic symbol posing as sublime—rose stately and quiet from a pool of purple darkness. Nothing moved. Not even a dog barked, for a wonder.

"Got the creeps?" asked Jeremy.

"Watch the minaret!"

A lantern appeared at the summit and disappeared—flashed for an instant, as it might be from the skirts of a protecting coat. Then, as whoever held it turned, its rays shone full on a man unmistakeable—too tall for the door—bent forward in it, bearded and immense—Narayan Singh! The image was gone in an instant, but it left no doubt. The Sikh was alert and moving.

"Something's wrong," said Grim.

"Wrong with your nut!" said Jeremy.

The lantern flashed again, and this time did not disappear. In some one's left hand—not Narayan Singh's, for they could see the legs beyond it and they did not move as the Sikh's would—it made the circuit of the gallery three times—then vanished.

"What do you suppose that means?"

"Sons of Ali fell asleep and off their perch. Narayan Singh looking for remains of 'em!" suggested Jeremy.

"It wasn't Narayan Singh who made the rounds," King answered. "That light to our right front disappeared and came on again after the signal."

"Signals, sure!" said Grim.

"Could the Sikh——"

"No!" Grim answered. "Narayan Singh is O. K."

"Trick-work nevertheless," said Jeremy. "There *were* three of Ali's sons on that gallery. They looked like great horned owls and we wondered before we all went to sleep what it was that resembled horns. Remember? Where are the three now?"

"I vote we investigate," said Grim.

"Seconded!"

"Unanimous!"

They reached a dark passage by way of neighboring roofs and dropped to street-level, nearly frightening to death the same policeman who had been disturbed by Habibullah. The servant of the public peace retreated at full speed and left them all that part of Delhi for experiments—assassination—robbery—what they willed. Since nationalism raised standard and voice the streets have not been safe for a lone policeman.

"If they've rescued our prisoner—" Grim began.

"More likely garotted him to keep him from talking," said King.

"Well, in either event——"

"We're flummoxed!"

King made no secret of his pessimism. He was all for action; all for reprisals; but he felt sure there had been disaster.

"If they've got him, we've lost our inside track. We'll never get another!" he said miserably.

There were no street sounds as they made their way cautiously along the shadows. Now and then a dog yelped in the distance, but as happens often when the moon has gone down all the neighborhood seemed hushed. Just once they heard—or thought they heard a cry and the *thump-thump-thump* of something falling. Then all was still again.

Suddenly a voice rose—high-pitched, eager, exultant:

"My son! Oh Allah! Oh my son!"

Another voice, low-growling, cursed the first one into silence. Then a door slammed. Voices again rose and fell in excited talk as it might be behind a wall; they were muted; the resonance was gone.

Grim in the lead began running. The others broke into a trot behind him. Grim stopped and drew his pistol. King came abreast feeling for his own weapon. Jeremy did the same on King's right. They were fifty paces from a man sitting in deepest shadow on a stone by the street-door of the minaret, who held his hand up, saying nothing.

"Narayan Singh!" said Grim at half-breath.

"Hurt?" (That was Jeremy.)

The Sikh seemed to be bending over something. He was holding up his hand for silence rather than to ward off an attack. He had recognized friends. They heard him growling in the general direction of the door, as if less talking behind him were what he craved. He rose as they approached, standing astride one fallen object,

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with another at his feet and a third behind him.

"It is good you came, *sahibs*. If you will drag these corpses in I will climb the wall and break the necks of Ali's sons! The sons of evil mothers shut the door on me, and are making more noise than stallions in a horse-camp!"

King laid his head to the door in the wall and gave tongue in the guttural speech of Sikunderam:

"Open, there, Ali! And silence!"

The door opened wide in a moment and Ali stood framed in the gloom:

"King sahib! *Sahibs!* Allah's blessing! Lo my boy! My Habibullah! Pride of my old heart! He slew three yellow ones with three blows of a tulwar! Three in three blows! There they lie! Lo! Look! The *tulwar!* See the blood on it! See the nick in the blade where it bit too deep and struck the wall beyond! A smiter! Ho! A true son of Sikunderam!"

"Peace! Silence!" ordered King, and turned again to help drag in the corpses of three men in yellow smocks.

"He shall have a purse and fifty rupees in it!" Ali boasted.

But Narayan Singh cut that short, brushing by him, straight forward to essentials, discovering Chullunder Ghose recumbent on the trap-door, acting dead-weight.

"Back again, then?" said Narayan Singh—it might be scornfully.

"*In statu quo*," the babu answered, smirking. "Unless dead, in which case disembodied spirit might emerge unobserved, prisoner is in durance vile beneath me—among rats!"

"You weren't here five minutes ago," said the Sikh. "Get off. Let the *sahibs* see."

"I was certainly successful vogue in former incarnation," said the babu, rolling to his hands and knees and heading for the door. "*Karma** now reversing rôle, I get away with nothing—absolutely!"

Narayan Singh raised the trap skeptically. Nevertheless, the prisoner was there. He blinked up at Grim, King and Jeremy. Smocked like himself in yellow they exactly fitted the only mental picture he had. Priest of a dreadful creed, dread was his portion. Likely he was only kept from suicide by the teaching that he who robs Kali of the joy of killing in her own way is doomed to flicker in the astral gloom for aeons, useless and hopeless, until finally he ceases in darkness and *never is*.

"Others were less fortunate than thee. To them no opportunity to make amends and ease the pangs of after-life! Behold them!" King said, speaking as if he himself were Karma, judging dead souls.

ONE by one—head in one hand, body in the other—Narayan Singh dumped the corpses of three followers of Kali down into the rat-infested dark; and Jeremy held the lantern so that he who had not lost his life yet might see and comprehend.

"Consider *them*," King warned him. "*They* died not by the handkerchief but by the sword, displeasing *Her* in death as well as life!"

And outside, just beyond the rays of the candle set in the niche of the outer wall, Chullunder Ghose held high dispute with Ali of Sikunderam.

"Shame?" said the babu. "I am utterly disreputable. Therefore appreciate value to others of what I lack. I assess shame of Habibullah at rupees a hundred. Ante up, as Jimgrim has it! Make it slippery and soon, as Jeremy sahib would say!"

"You have no honor!" Ali retorted hotly.

"None!" agreed the babu. "All dishonor me—including you! Insult me with rupees a hundred, or I will tell who slew those three! Habibullah will then resemble egg thoroughly sucked by grandmother—all hollow! The money please."

"May the curse of the Prophet of Allah, whose name none taketh in vain, wither and disintegrate thy bowels! May the worms that die not eat thee! May food be to thee like ashes and thy drink as bitter as a goat's gall! May thy——"

"Certainly!" said the babu. "Money please! Or else——"

So Ali of Sikunderam drew painfully from somewhere underneath his shirt—like a man pulling out a long thorn or a well barbed arrow-head—one bank-note for a hundred rupees, and the babu pouched it.

"Then it is agreed," said Ali, "that Habibullah slew those three with three strokes of his *tulwar?*"

"Agreed," said Chullunder Ghose. "Do you wish receipt in writing with stipulation black on white? Will sign same. No extra charge!"

*Karma. The law by which sins of a former life are inevitably compensated for in this life or a future one, and good deeds in the same way are rewarded.

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"See this!" said Ali, showing his own knife. "The bargain is made. You have the money. Keep faith, or feel this!"

"My aunt!" said the babu, and shuddered. (But the shudder may have been the camouflaging movement under which he slipped the money into hiding.)

King, Grim and Jeremy emerged from within the minaret, listening to Narayan Singh, who wiped his hands on a piece of sacking and talked in low tones.

"Give Habibullah credit for it, *sahibs*. He was afraid of them, but what odds? He and I climbed down by the broken masonry and waited in the shadow of the wall. I would have used a pistol, but feared the police, so when the three came near I said to Habibullah 'Draw, and smite!' The fellow's hand was trembling so that he nicked the edge of the tulwar against the wall! And they came on, perhaps thinking we were waiting to welcome them. So I took the tulwar from him and struck three times. Then I gave the weapon back and said: 'Well smitten! Good sword, Habibullah!' And Ali heard, listening through the key-hole. He opened the door and called his bastard in, slamming it again on me. So I waited, hoping no police would come to see the bodies and start trouble."

Grim laughed silently. He had seen the Sikh's harvest before, and could have told his sword-cuts from among a hecatomb.

"Habibullah's head will swell, though, if we let him boast of what he didn't do," said King.

"Let it swell, *sahib*. It will fall the easier. These men in yellow are no *Sadhus** blessing their enemies. They hold revenge more sweet than a hill-bear does wild honey. Let Habibullah boast of it!"

"Let's go!" said Jeremy suddenly. "I'm betting all I've got, those three were watched. For every one Narayan Singh killed there'll be ten on our track before morning!"

The eyes of all four met in the light of the match that Jeremy struck to light his cigaret. All four men nodded.

"Chullunder Ghose!"

The babu heard King's low call and came on the run, like a hippopotamus in flight for water.

"Quick now! Think!" King ordered. "Problem is to evacuate. Take away the prisoner—leave corpses here—all go somewhere safe, unseen. Do you think we can make the office in the Chandni Chowk?"

"Oh golly!" said the babu. You could feel him growing gray that instant. "Best imaginable is same ox-cart used for general obsequies under direction of Ramsden *sahib*. Same is at Gauri's—probably—oxen asleep in gutter and——"

"Go get it!" ordered Grim. "Narayan Singh, go with him! Send Ramsden back, and wait at Gauri's, both of you!"

"For my emolument I take a manifold of risks!" Chullunder Ghose said. "Oh, fickle Fortune, I am undone this time! *Eimai, Ollola*, as Greeks would say! I vanish!"

And he did. His adiposity was no apparent handicap when sweet life was at stake. He had the gift of making even Ali's sullen brother open swiftly, and the door slammed shut behind babu and Sikh before King and Grim could light their cigarets from Jeremy's. Thereafter he made no more noise than a pariah dog would, slinking down dark alleys.

Followed conference. At best they would be a noticeable cortège marching in front and rear of an ox-cart drawn by such magnificent beasts as Chullunder Ghose would bring presently, if luck permitted. And at worst some one in yellow would tip off the police to interfere, perhaps accusing them of running contraband. Arrest, then, would be inevitable, and would mean the end of their investigation of the Nine Unknown.

Evidently more than one of the spurious Nines was linked against them, all guided by an unseen hand. There was no guessing whence the next assault would come, although it was fair to presume it would be surreptitious. Ali of Sikunderam, called into conference, turned Job's comforter:

"*They say* these followers of Kali have noiseless weapons, *sahibs!* Tubes that deliver a poisoned dart with accuracy as far as a revolver shoots! The poison is brewed from the venom of cobras and the blood of vampires—very quick stuff. A man struck by it falls conscious, yet stupefied, and in great pain sees himself decompose until the stink from his own body suffocates him in the end!"

"What do you advise?" King asked him.

"An exorcism! Let my brother hunt up a brewer of potions, and all the darts of Kali will never hurt us! A man known to my brother brewed me a potion before I

*Holy men.

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returned to the Hills once on a time to establish Habibullah's parentage. Behold me: I live! He who disputed my claim was buried in more than one piece and in more than one place! Ho! I scattered him among the villages as Allah spreads the wind! I hewed him! I——"

"Good! Let your brother go," King interrupted.

There was virtue in the strange proposal. Ali's brother was a surly, ill-conditioned brute, too long possessed of a sinecure to be depended on. In a pinch he would be a positive handicap to whichever side he was on, and to be rid of him by any tolerable means was good use of opportunity. The brother himself provided all the absolution necessary.

"I should be paid!" he objected. "They ask to have their lives preserved. They could not find the magician without me. They should pay me rupees fifty!"

He could have had more, if he had only known. Grim paid him fifty and spoke him civilly, shoving him out through the gate. It was Jeremy, watching him curiously over the top of the wall where a broken stone provided a safe vantage point—just out of curiosity, to see which way he went, as he explained it afterward—who saw him shot down from behind by a dart that made no noise.

A PART, then, of Ali's croaking had been accurate! His brother lay, if not dead, motionless. Jeremy, up at his niche in the wall, reported some one in what might be a yellow smock creeping up along the darkest shadows, searching the body, taking money and everything else he could find. Whereat Ali, using Habibullah's back for vaulting horse, leaped on the wall with the stone in his hands that had once sat in Jeremy's niche and, standing for better effect, hurled the stone down on the back of the head of the robber—and was gone down like a deep-sea diver in its wake before a voice could check him. None knew—not even he—whether he had lost his footing or just followed to make sure.

They heard a skull crack under the impact of the stone, and Ali's voice, calling before his feet touched earth for the door to be opened for him. King opened and admitted some one else! A man in a yellow robe, exactly like those they three were wearing, strode in and stood with folded arms confronting them—producing the effect of ice on keyed imagination! Habibullah raised the candle. Its light shone on beads of sweat on the cruellest face, as the handsomest, that any of the three had ever seen.

Bronze, as the other men had been. Smiling like the Sphinx—an incarnate enigma. Tall., Strong as a gorilla, judging by the heft and set of splendid shoulders. Standing with the air of absolute authority that only years of use of it can give. In majesty, in intellect, and in impressiveness, as far above those others who had hounded them as eagles are above the beasts they watch.

He stood in silence, and in due time with one finger pointed at the tell-tale cigarets. Those contradicted the disguise of yellow robes and caste-mark. Surprize, or whatever it was that had numbed the minds of all three, now set King's wits moving again. He wondered why Ali had not taken advantage of the open door, and strode to shut it before any more of the enemy could enter. He with the bronze face touched him on the arm. King kicked the door shut with his foot, and as the spring-lock snapped he turned about to face a weapon he knew well.

He had cut his eye-teeth in the Indian Secret Service, and therefore knew the feel of hypnotism. He knew the only way to stand against it—switched his thought instantly to another object—anything—anything whatever, so be it served to concentrate his will and was outside the thought of the practitioner. Mathematics was King's formula. They vary. Each man acts on experience, and some withstand while others fail. He worked out in his head the cube of 77, and turned to swing for the jaw of the hypnotist.

His brain felt free but the blow failed. It glanced off as if guarded by a pugilist; and yet the newcomer had not moved. That was descent into subjection—step one! The others would follow swiftly. The man with the bronze face smiled at him, and King faced about—turned his back on him—worked with an ice-cold frenzy at the problem of the square of the hypotenuse—eliminating all else, visualizing the diagram—winning back to self-command and sanity.

The other two stood motionless. As they described it afterward, they thought they had been struck by one of Ali's fabled darts, making them inert while still aware of what

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was happening. They felt no pain, but there was a strange sensation in the ears and behind the eyes.

King was not more than half-in-command of himself. Habibullah and the other two of Ali's sons were stricken with supersitious awe. And on the door that King had kicked shut Ali of Sikunderam was now thundering with a fist and the hilt of his knife; it sounded like marriage tom-toms in the distance—somewhere away at the other side of Delhi—yesterday—last week—months ago—anywhere and any time but here and now.

"So it's up to me, is it?" said King to himself.

He sized up his antagonist, and fancied matching strength with him still less than he did the risk of attracting police to the scene. Suddenly he drew his automatic. And as suddenly the man in yellow moved a hand that touched the pistol. A shock like electricity went up King's arm and he dropped the pistol because he could not help it. The man in yellow, still smiling through his bronze mask, kicked it away into the shadows.

"Any more weapons?" he asked—in English! His voice was as magnificent as his stature—as surprizing.

King knew he counted on the effect of it, for the hypnotist works by rule of thumb and uses one trick after another until the resisting victim yields. He hung on to his remaining self-command like a man overboard clinging to an oar, and was conscious of the sound of wheels advancing up-street. He could hear bullocks' feet. He knew what that meant.

Ali's hammering ceased, and just as suddenly began again.

"What do you want?" King demanded—a very unsafe question to put to a skillful hypnotist, unless you happen to be just as skillful in defense. It was tantamount to lowering his guard by way of tempting an opponent. But he knew that all he had to do was gain time now and keep the man's attention. A hypnotist engaged in trying to master three strong men at once is as oblivious to other sounds and circumstances as his victims will be when he has control of them.

"You!" said the fellow with the bronze face. "Only you! These are not strong enough!"

He pushed Grim and Jeremy—brushed them aside with his left hand, and they fell to the ground as if he had pole-axed them. That of itself had almost been enough to overcome the last of King's resistance, only that King's face was toward the wall and the bronze man had his back to it. King saw something, and the other did not even hear.

"You know so much, you shall be a Ninth, and later on perhaps a captain of a Nine!" He continued to speak English.

The bronze smile never varied, but the dark eyes changed; they were considering King's resistance, speculating as to the source of its strength, calculating which next trick to play. Slowly, the way a serpent moves advancing on a spell-bound bird, his right arm began to approach King's eyes, and every faculty the man owned was concentrated in one immense magnetic effort to induce a responding state of mind in King. King knew that if the finger touched him he would go down under it beaten—for the time at all events.

He stepped back—saw the wall—again saw something else—another, less inhuman hand—stepped back again and shouted to help break the spell—

"Rammy!"

JEFF boasts that eight of him would weigh a ton. If so, two hundredweight and a half of solid bone and muscle landed from the top of the wall feet-first on the shoulders of the hypnotist—as unexpected and as efficacious as a mine exploded in a crisis! The hypnotist was caught off-guard, and all his deviltry was no more good.

Slow to think and cautious as he always is, Ramsden had lain on the top of the wall to listen and look before jumping. He knew what to do. He had the whole plan mapped out in his mind. But he knew, too, that his only chance of executing it was to keep the bronze enemy engaged. Give him a minute's respite and he would be as dangerous as ever. The two had gone down on the stone flags hard enough to knock the senses out of any ordinary men. But the enemy recovered as swiftly as a snake recoiling for the strike, and Jeff had to wade in fist-first whether he wanted to or not, taking the fight to him, giving him no grace for concentration, forcing him on the defensive, barking his orders at King like irregular explosions from a motor-car's exhaust.

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"Let Ali in! Out o' here! Leave this t'me! Get Grim! Get Jeremy! Quick! Cyprian's! I'll fix this——"

Fixing consisted of catch-as-catch-can no hold barred all the fist-work thrown in there was time and room for. He of the bronze face knew his hour was come unless he could break the arms and legs of his heavy assailant. His occult powers were as contingent on environment and suitable conditions as are steam and electricity.

Jeff knew he could expect no quarter. Weight for weight they were a match, and strength for strength—a man who had kept fit by wrestling because he loved the last ounce of the grit and guts he drew from the Great Quartermaster's store—and another who had cultivated strength from a delight in mastery, and cruelty, and the ability to go unchallenged. The magic of good nature, slow to wrath, against black magic and relentlessness!

It was not easy to judge which way the odds were.

They tore, wrenched, struck, and scrambled for holds like lions in the mating season when the lioness looks on. Once the man in yellow set his teeth into Jeff's collar-bone and tried to tear it out; but that only offered Jeff a steady target for his fist; it was as good as a head in chancery; Jeff's fist when home into the other's jaw with a blow that put all hypnotism out of the question for the rest of that fight; it was like the thump of a pole-ax in the slaughter yards.

Every hold that either got was broken by fist-work or some other means that would be reckoned fouling in the ring. Again and again each crashed the other's head down on the stone flags. They fought beside the stones that had fallen from the summit of the minaret, striving to break each other's bones against sharp corners. Once, when the man in yellow drew a deep breath, Jeff got three fingers in under his ribs and all but tore them out. That was the only time when pain drew a cry from either of them. According to Ali, who was hectoring his sons, dragging out the prisoner, helping King to carry out Grim and Jeremy, and narrating his own adventure between breaths, they looked like a tiger battling with a python as they rolled, heaved, struck and snarled for breath under the torture of each other's holds. King said they looked like an illustration out of Dante's Hell.

They bled from collision with the masonry. They soon became so slippery with blood that no hold held, and that was when Jeff's advantage gradually told—(if gradually means much in a fight that was as swift as the whirling typhoon is from start to finish.) Ramsden had the other's arm bent backward around his head and was twisting it with one hand while he kept a scissors-hold and pounded the man's eyes with the other fist—when King at last got the prisoner and Grim and Jeremy, with Ali's sons for guard, into the covered ox-cart.

King came on the run then. He reached the spot as the bronze man broke the scissors-hold and writhed heels-over-head to untwist the tortured arm. And as King picked up a broken stone to brain the enemy, Jeff rose—swept up his weakening man by neck and leg—lifted him—and with an effort born of twenty years' clean living and good will hurled him head-first on to the flags. His skull cracked like an egg.

"I *said* I'd fix him. Let him lie," said Jeff beginning to feel himself for damages.

"No, bring him," King answered.

Without waiting for the reason Jeff gathered up the still pulsating body and carried it outside to the already crowded bullock-cart. There Ali was holding forth to his sons, talking to them from the driver's seat through the embroidered curtains:

"Remember that, sons of forgetfulness! Bury my brother and bear it in mind against the day of revenge. He died like a fool, but I was wise. I felt the tingle of the magic and fell unresisting. Put him in the wagon gently. Lo, they took the rupees Jimgrim gave him! But I live! Hah! I lay considering how to attack that devil from behind! When the tingling left my bones I used my knife-hilt on the door, and if Rammy sahib had not come I——"

"One man make room for this corpse! Let the prisoner make its intimate acquaintance!" King interrupted.

So Ali's advice to his sons was cut short and one of the guards had to get out and follow the cart, in which were now two corpses, the prisoner Ali, and two sons, and Grim and Jeremy. Ramsden acted as driver, sticking his toes under the bullocks' tails in the fashion of Hindustan and steering with a tail in each hand, making noises

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to the patient brutes pretty closely resembling the cry of an angry parrot.

Ramsden could have passed for a hospital case without extra make-up. His late antagonist had used the losing desperado's recipe, disfiguring where he could not break, in the vain hope of destroying the superior man's morale. With hair torn from his black beard—raw seams where the Hindu's fingernails had grouted—blood in his hair, and turban gone—torn raiment, and great bruises showing through the rents—Ramsden looked more like a wild man from the Hills than any sort of civilized being. And that was no ill circumstance in itself, for it tended to prevent interference.

The same solitary constable who had run when Grim, Jeremy and King dropped down into the street like highwaymen, came close to regain his own self-respect by bullying these night-farers. But King walked in front in yellow garb, with that red caste-mark on his forehead; one of the sons of Ali with a *tulwar* walked behind, making the keen steel whistle and announcing that three heads with three blows was his average score. Worst of all, Ramsden sat perched above the shaft-tail, looking capable and willing to pull any man to pieces—growling like a big bear.

So the constable remarked it was a hot night, and Habibullah called him a liar, saying no heat was like that of Tophet, where the enemies all went whom he beheaded three at a time with three blows.

"Ho! I scatter their brains for the birds!" he shouted, until even Father Ali—richer than he had been—considered it expedient to reprimand him.

"Have I wasted rupees fifty on an empty boaster?" he demanded acidly through the rear embroidered curtains; and thenceforward Habibullah marched sedately, thumbing the *tulwar* instead of swinging it, reflecting on life's little ironies no doubt.

INSIDE the ox-cart Grim and Jeremy recovered presently, not having once lost consciousness. The effect of the bronze man's hypnotism had been like that of the drug curare, paralyzing the nerve centers yet leaving them free to feel and to think as acutely as ever. The hypnosis lasted several minutes after the man's death.

"Proving," said Grim, "that we ourselves did it to us. All he did was to know how to make us do it."

But that did not help Jeremy. He was disconsolate. Shame ate his heart out that he, the deceiver of thousands, the ventriloquist, the conjurer, should have fallen captive of another's bow and spear.

"For it's as much a trick as palming 'em!" he grumbled. "I swear it's a trick! By crikey, I'll learn it, and by —— I'll hypnotize the whole of India! You watch!"

Grim lit an oil lamp that hung in a bracket from the roof and, more with the notion of quieting Jeremy than anything, began to introduce the prisoner to the corpse. It was no use pretending any longer to the prisoner that they were Indian members of a different Nine; he had heard them speaking English.

But there was a chance that he knew no German, and an almost equally good one that superstition had eaten all his judgment long ago. Grim whispered a long while in German to Jeremy, who presently raised the battered corpse and propped it in the corner, where the feeble lamp-rays shone on the face and the open eyes. The jaw fell, and Grim, watching the prisoner's face, settled back into his own dark corner satisfied.

The corpse spoke!

"I am dead!" it announced in Punjabi through broken teeth that had left their mark indelibly on Ramsden's fist.

The prisoner gasped. Ali and his sons grew gray with fear. Their teeth chattered. Ali would have used the hilt of his long knife on the corpse to beat it into silence but for Grim's restraining arm. The atmosphere was perfect for any kind of illusion—stifling, electric, full of panic.

"I am dead, but the silver cord is not yet cut," said the corpse.

Even Grim felt a shiver pass through him. He reached up and turned the light out lest the illusion fail, for the jaw had dropped unseemly and betrayed no intention of closing again to frame the words that Jeremy put into it. Nevertheless, they had seen the blood and the broken teeth—enough to account for faults of pronunciation.

"I see dimly—only dimly," said the corpse. "Who sits against me?"

Two of the sons of Ali, deathly frightened, named their names. The corpse went on with sharper accent:

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"Who else? I smell——"

The word smell may have had significance unknown to Jeremy. It made the prisoner toe the line. He sat up straight and answered:

"I sit in front of you. Why speak Punjabi? Talk in our tongue!"

"I? I? Who is I?" the corpse demanded angrily.

"Nanak."

"Ah! I had looked for Nanak. I was seeking Nanak when the Karma overtook me.* Nanak—listen!"

"Speak the secret tongue!" said Nanak, trembling in his last effort to retain incredulity and self-control.

Grim struck a match and blew it out. The moment's flash lit up the dead face, making it seem to move—an accident—one of those accidents that do occur to men who strive persistently. All that Grim had intended was to guard against Nanak's escape.

"Nay. For I will not speak twice; and these must understand," said the corpse. "Hear thou me, Nanak. These are they of an alien race whom the gods have sent to unmask the Nine Unknown. Obey them, Nanak. For the Nine Unknown are known to the gods, who have endured them long enough."

The prisoner had passed the point of incredulity and hesitated on the verge of full belief.

"If thou speakest truth," he said, "tell me, why art thou dead, and I living?"

A poser for the priests! But the answer was as prompt as the solution of any trick staged by Jeremy.

"Karma† overtook me. The tale of thy years, Nanak, has a while to run. Thy willingness to shield a friend at thy cost has obtained thee a privilege. Obey these men, Nanak, that the gods may love and recompense thee!"

The corpse ceased speaking. In the unsuing silence Nanak with a cracking throat sought to induce it to say more, wheedling, imploring, praying for answers to a score of doubts that tortured his bewildered mind.

But if Jeremy knows one thing it is this: Never repeat a miracle! If lightning never strikes the same tree twice, no conjurer need hope to mystify again the same audience in the same place with the self-same trick.

Grim struck another match and lit the lamp. The corpse looked more dead than even Ali's brother did, who lay face-downward with the thin, round end of a brass dart just protruding from the base of his shaved skull. The dead thing's head lolled sideways and rolled with each bump of the two-wheeled cart, amid a chorus of quick, low-breathed exclamations of:

"Allah! Lord of Mercies! Nay, there is no God but Allah! Allah! Allah!"

Then came Chullunder Ghose, near-naked and beside himself, charging by King, not recognizing him, distracted, slippery with sweat. King's fingers slipped off his arm and failed to bring him to a halt. He ran straight at the big oxen, that will gore a white man but permit the vegetarian Hindu almost any liberties. Setting a foot on the bow of the yoke between them he leaped along it and collapsed in Ramsden's lap—a mound of hot flesh on a fellow, every inch of whose anatomy was sore.

"Oh my! Most awful happenings! Rammy sahib——"

Ramsden, saying nothing, bundled him over the rump of the near ox to the street, where he lay for a minute calling on a pantheon of gods and devils. It was luck that preserved the wheel from passing over him. King turned back; Grim and Jeremy emerged; Chullunder Ghose was hauled clear of hoofs and wheels. Ali of Sikunderam suggested drastic remedies.

"A Hindu thinks fire is a god.‡ Burn him then with matches! Let the god wring speech from him!"

"Oh terrible! Oh awful happenings!" moaned the babu.

They could not wait there in mid-street while Chullunder Ghose rambled of uncertainties. Nor was there room for the babu in the covered cart without removing guards or corpses. Corpses had it. One corpse at all events.

"Out with him! Into the shadow! In with the babu! That's it—drive on, Rammy!"

Noises that only oxen understand emerged from Jeff's aching throat, and with a tail in each hand again he sent the conveyance forward, only to bring it to a halt a moment later.

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*I. e. when he was killed by Ramsden.

†It is an axiom that neither man nor any of the gods can prevent the fulfillment of the law of Karma.

‡Agni—the principle of fire.

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Now another apparition raged up-street, as nearly naked as the babu had been—bearded, this one—swift—enormous—with a turban still in place and shaking what looked like a club in his right hand.

"*Sahibs!*"

"Quick, Narayan Singh! What's happened?"

He could hardly speak for gasping. There was spittle on his black beard—smoke, and its stinging red-rimmed traces in his eyes—a cut across his knuckles where he had guarded a blow—and a bloody, wet mess where a knife of some kind had passed between arm and ribs.

"They got my pistol!"

"Who? How? When? Where?"

"They did! Now! From behind!"

"Where, man? Where?"

"Her house! Gauri's!"

"Where's Cyprian?"

"*Sahibs! Sahibs!*" Narayan Singh was wilder-eyed than ever. The thing in his hand was no club, but a broken section of a bed-rail. He shook it like a clansman summoning the border-watch:

"They have burned the house!"

"And Cyprian?"

"My sons! My sons!" yelled Ali of Sikunderam. "I left four of them at Gauri's!"

He waited for no ceremony of permission—charged down-street with the sons remaining, waving his Khyber knife, beside Habibullah, bidding him make good his newly won fame as a smiter of three in three blows. And in the nick of time Jeremy pounced on the prisoner, who was seizing the obvious advantage; they fought under the wheels, rolling over and over, hardly noticed until Jeremy found breath to shout for help—a shout that saved Chullunder Ghose.

For while the babu lay in something like hysterics, grateful for the darkness in the covered cart, three men in yellow crept from the rear and groped over the cart-tail, seizing Ali's brother's corpse by both the feet and dragging it out in such light as there was for inspection.

"Dead! Nay, he is not the boaster!" said a voice in Punjabi.

"Look!" said another. "They fight under the cart! Our *guru* is alive!"

"Nay, we found the *guru's* body! Those are others! Slay!"

It was then that Jeremy shouted—then that King, Grim and Ramsden darted around the cart—then that one of the men in yellow answered—

"Nay, I say I *saw* the boaster run!"

So whether they fled from Grim and Jeremy, or whether Jeff's appearance was too terrifying, or whether they dared all in lust for vengeance on the man who "slew three Kali-wallahs with three smites," did not transpire. They fled, dodging the blows aimed left and right at them—dodging even the terrific swipe of Narayan Singh's broken bed-rail—leaving behind neither explanation nor the corpse of the *guru* with the bronze face—although where they had cached that was another mystery.

King tied the prisoner, Ramsden superintending. They roped him into the cart by arms and legs, while Grim kept watch and Chullunder Ghose gasped up his bad news sentence about with the Sikh.

"They killed the Gauri with a cord!"

"*Sahibs*, they fired the house and——"

"They seized me, and——"

"*Sahibs*, I went for Cyprian, but they had him already. The bed was empty, and I broke it for a club to——"

"——, you men!" said Ramsden. "Why not go to the house and see."

CHAPTER XIII

"I felt the tingle of the magic and fell unresisting."

THEY went. They saw. There was not a trace of Cyprian—only the Gauri's house in flames and a belated fire-engine in charge of a weary man who said—

"These women's houses are a bad risk—jealousy, you know—carousal—anything may happen—lamp upset—arson maybe—you police——"

But the policeman had his hands full and, being a white officer, in a land where they say the white man's bolt is shot, sought excuses for not interfering too much.

"Native prejudices, don't you know."

There lay a man in mid-street, belly-downward, with a great wound in his back such as ten lives could have sped through—a northerner—Hillman by the look of him—perhaps Sikunderam. Quarrelsome lot, those tribesmen. Probably he set the fire and died for it.

But what should a wretched policeman do, with the certainty that a Hindu lawyer would be hired by somebody to accuse him

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of stirring racial passions? He ordered the corpse carried to the morgue, to await identification.

Around a corner hardly a hundred yards away stood Ali of Sikunderam, most bitterly reviling fate between the bouts of explanation that he brandished, as it were, in the teeth of friends:

"*Sahibs*, they slew him as a beast is slain—my Habibullah! They ran from behind and hit him with a butcher's cleaver! What can I do? How can I claim the body? The police——"

"But how—listen, Ali! How did they come to pick Habibullah?"

"*Sahibs*—have I not said? The house was burning and no *ishteamer** yet. And no police. One stood by the corner and asked me as I ran, 'Who is the great one who can slay three men with three blows?' Who am I that I should swallow pride? I answered: 'Lo! My son, my Habibullah! He slew three with three blows! Will you see him try the feat again?' said I. And with that the fellow shouted, 'Him first!' pointing. Whereat about a dozen men ran forth from a doorway, and one of them smote my son with the cleaver!"

"What did you do?" asked Narayan Singh, standing in the shadow of the ox-cart for concealment's sake; for he looked like a man who had come hot from fighting.

"What *could* I do? *Ishteamers came*—two of them—and the police. May Allah blast the lives of the police! I ran—I and my two sons. What else?"

"No sign of Father Cyprian?"

"None! Nor of my four sons!" answered Ali, running the fingers of both hands through his gray-shot beard. "If my sons lie in the ashes yonder, burned by Hindus, may Allah so do to me and more likewise unless I burn half of Delhi to the ground! I will lay India waste! I will raise a *lashkar*† in the Hills and raid and rape this land until a Hindu won't dare show himself! I——"

"Hs-s-sh!" said King. "We can't wait here. What next?"

"What next is where to hide ox-cart!" sighed Chullunder Ghose. "Characteristic of ox-carts being traceability! Requirements of this party, self included, being absence from the flesh at present! Even the police could trace us by the corpses—like a lot of bottles! Deabuch of bloodshed! Self am drunk with blood—inebriated—very! I say office! That is advice of blood-drunk babu! Go to office. Subsequently I lose ox-cart in Chandni Chowk, being goat as usual!"

"But the prisoner?"

"I said 'subsequently'," sighed Chullunder Ghose, oppressed in spirit by the world's obtuseness and its too material demands. "To the office with the prisoner; to —— with me. Your servant, *sahibs! Vae victis!* Caught with stolen ox-cart, trying to conceal same under garbage—no friends—no attorney—ten years—*verb. sap.*—are we going? Yes?"

They went, but Ali and one son backed off, promising to turn up at the office by another route. Ramsden, with Jeremy to lend him aid and countenance, sought an Eurasian apothecary, to whom Jeremy told fabulously interesting tales of dark intrigue while Ramsden was sluiced out, salved and bandaged—"*à la* queen's taste," as the man of drugs described it. Thereafter Jeremy and Ramsden chose a round-about route, using every trick in Jeremy's compendium for throwing off pursuit—which brought them, subject to the quirks of Destiny, beneath the window of a building, whence policemen issued—five—that minute freed from extra duty—arguing.

"It was a hundred-rupee note!" said one of them.

"Nay, fifty!"

"I saw!"

"I likewise!"

"I say it was fifty!"

"I saw you take it from his clothes. It was in a leather purse. You threw the purse away. It was a hundred!"

"Fifty!"

"Show us then!"

They all stood in a group beneath a street light, and the man who had emerged first drew a fifty-rupee note from his pants pocket, carefully unfolded it, and held it in the pale rays.

"Good that we were all dismissed together, or it would have been but ten by now!" said one of them, and they all laughed.

"Who can change it? Ten for each of us!"

They laughed again. Not one of them had change. Ramsden and Jeremy were within five paces when the laugh was cut

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*Ishteamer: Fire-engine. Anything that goes by steam.
†Army.

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short—turned into the blasphemy of spitting cats—and like the blast that whoops along the valleys of his homeland Ali of Sikunderam with one son swept into the middle of the group, snatched the fifty-rupee note, spat in the face of the man who had held it, and vanished!

"——!" exclaimed Ramsden. "Now we're 'it!' "

He was right, or he would have been, but for Jeremy. Failing the right victim, pick the easiest and "shake him down!"

The five policemen turned on two who might have money, and who looked easy to convict of almost anything.

"*Sahibs!*" said Jeremy; and the very title flattered them. "This is the servant of the *Burra-wallah* High Commissioner Dipty sahib. He and I recognized those rascals!"

The police closed in around them.

"This bandaged bear? The Dipty-*sahib's* butler maybe? A fine tale!"

"Aye! And an end to it, unless ye use discretion!"

Jeremy fell back on dignity of the assumed kind—something that he lacks unless by way of mimicry. To a man those five police were Moslems. Jeremy was robed in the hated garb of a Hindu sect notorious as more fanatical than even the most bigoted "True-believers." But the police of most of the cities of the world have experienced the fruits of interference with entrenched ecclesiastics. However lawless, they let them alone if they may, occasionally envying, no doubt, the opportunities for "honest increment" so hugely greater—so immensely safer than their own.

This follower of Kali doubtless had his own way of exerting influence. It *might* be true that the "Dipty-sahib" kept a strong man in his pay for private reasons. If it were a lie, the man in bandages seemed none the less to be befriended by a member of a dangerous cult.

"Dogs!" snarled Jeremy. "Will ye snoot among the garbage, or be laid on a true scent?"

He was giving them no option really. No policeman, not the most cantankerous Mahommedan, would dare refuse a clew from a religious personage. None might wear those orange-yellow robes except the recognized initiates of a dreaded mystery. That much was notorious. Surely no initiate would play a trick on the police.

"You know where we may find those robbers?" one asked with as much deference in his voice and manner as he found compatible with True-believing.

"I know," answered Jeremy. But he knew, no more than they, as he recounted afterward, the sheer, stark impudence of the trick he was going to play on them. He was simply "spieling," as he called it—"talking to encourage the ideas to come;" and whenever Jeremy does that the unexpected happens.

"Show us, *sahib*."

Jeremy's whole facial expression changed. The idea had come to him, smiling from the blue. He wore now the look of rapt intensity with which he holds an audience, while his subtle fingers achieve impossibilities of legerdemain. That look of itself alone would have been sufficient, but for Ramsden; he had to explain away Ramsden satisfactorily, or else to extricate him brazenly, and the difficulty only added to the zest.

"You know *our* house?" he asked, selecting his words to avoid a compromising wrong phrase. (He did not even know at that time whether or not the followers of Kali had a temple, or even a meeting place in Delhi.)

"The temple of Kali? Surely," said one of the police.

"Well—go to that, and——"

They looked disappointed, and the air of deference waned visibly, as Jeremy noticed; but they did not know he noticed it.

"Nay, better; I go with you. Lead on. We will follow to attract less notice."

THE police agreed to go four in front, provided one of them might follow behind for "discretionary purposes."

They were not capable of quite trusting a Hindu stranger in the circumstances, any more than Jeremy was really sure they could guide him to the enemy's headquarters. But the police know scores of things of which they do not comprehend the significance. They led Jeremy and Ramsden to the very door of a temple, on whose front the image of the Dreadful Bride of Siva scowled through her regalia of snakes and skulls.

It was a battered image. Moslem rule and riot each had taken toll of it. The

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nose was missing. Not a snake or skull of all her ornaments was whole. The dirt of a generation and the tireless energy of time had joined their forces, so that Kali's face was ground like that of the poor—into unrecognition; part of the disguise, that, like the necklaces and snakes. None cared. None visited that temple to ask unpleasant questions. Though the purlieus of the door were clean enough to appease the municipal inspectors, the gloom within was unattractive. He who lurked in a yellow smock in the shadows beyond the threshold was no showman, but a guardian of sacred privacy, whose very glance was a rebuff.

"Do ye dare enter?" Jeremy asked of the about-to-be-confused police.

They naturally did not dare. It dawned on them that they were fooled, and helpless.

"You should look for your Hillmen in a coffee-shop, three streets to your right and straight along for half a mile," he told them, smiling.

So they smiled back, dejectedly, as victims of a practical joke who do not care to admit they are annoyed. They saw him thrust Ramsden toward the inner temple gloom, and turned away with a grim jest about Hindus and holy places that would have done credit to the Prophet of Allah himself.

"Let's sit," suggested Jeremy.

Ramsden sat down, almost on the threshold, almost absolutely invisible in the deep night that precedes dawn; and Jeremy beside him, next the street.

"We'll give them time to lose sight of us, and then hoof it," said Jeremy. "Meanwhile, we know now where the yellow-jackets' nest is. If a yellow-belly sees us he'll mistake me for a member of the gang."

"Not so!" said a voice in the dark within a yard of him, in English.

He looked into the eyes of death—of Kali!—of the Goddess of Annihilation!—into the eyes of Siva's awful Bride! Her arm reached out toward him from the darkness. Living snakes, encircling her hair like tresses of Medusa, writhed as in torment. Skulls that might have been of monkeys or of men—that was no telling in that light—rattled like dry gourds on a rope about her shoulders. There was a faint smell, not of a charnel-house, but of herbs that suggested prophylaxis, and by inference the reason for it—blood!

"Catch hold of me!" gasped Ramsden, reaching for Jeremy's hand. But he was fixing his attention elsewhere.

The goddess was young, as with a youth eternal. Full lips, cheeks, breasts—burning eyes aflow with something else than greed—a plump arm, shapely as a serpent—grace of movement—snakes—and dry skulls!

And the smell—the word "smell," Jeremy remembered, had brought that yellow-robed prisoner to his senses—the penetrating, subtle smell of herbs did more than offset things. It banished them! They faded out.

Ramsden had lost consciousness, huge and heavy, with his shoulders across Jeremy's thighs, until some one took him by both feet and drew him into the temple. Jeremy felt himself going. The gloom swam—full of Kali's glowing eyes—she seemed to have scores of them that everlastingly reduced themselves to two.

"I felt the tingle of the magic and fell unresisting!"

He remembered Ali's boast. He let himself go—lay back in the arms of some one whom he could not see—Kali's arms and her snakes for aught he knew!—and let them drag him unresisting head-first into the darkness that was cool and echoing and dry.

So he was conscious when they slammed a door on him. Nor would he have been Jeremy if he had lain still, uninquisitive. He set to work to grope about a great room, stumbling over Ramsden's inert bulk, until his hand rested on a truckle-bed and his ears heard breathing. He produced matches from the belt in which he kept cigarets and money under his smock—struck one—saw a face he knew, and burned his fingers while he stared at it.

"By God! Pop Cyprian!"

CHAPTER XIV

"We've got your chief!"

"RAMMY, old top!"

Jeff Ramsden had moved, and Jeremy's voice in the womb of blackness greeted his return to consciousness. But he had to repeat the words several times before there was any answer; Jeff had forgotten where he left off, and lay cautious like the centipede "considering how to run."

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"Listen, it's me, Jeremy. We're under Kali's temple, and Pop Cyprian's here sleeping like a baby on a full meal. I've struck matches—seven left—can't find lamp or candle. I'll strike one more, and keep the last six for emergencies. Wake up!"

It dawned on Jeff that Jeremy did not consider this was an emergency. He laughed.

"Good enough!" said Jeremy. "Don't stare at the match. It's the last, remember."

There are those who don't believe in miracles, but accept the turning on of light as commonplace. Moreover, they may vote, and some are known as educators.

This happened: where nothing was, and no light, suddenly a vaulted crypt developed, glowing with the color of warm gold wherever rays from a mean, imported Japanese match shone on a projection. Agni, leaping from the womb of wood, had wrought another wonder, that was all. (The age of miracles is done.)

Between two shadows of carved pillars lay Cyprian face-upward, like a corpse laid out for burial, but breathing rhythmically, smiling like a man who sees beyond the veil and is agreeably surprized. He lay on army blankets on a bed that could be carried easily, and was covered up to the armpits with a white sheet. The shadows all around him leaped like things alive. Arches appeared and vanished. Jeff tried to guess the height of the vaulted roof above him.

"——!" remarked Jeremy. "That's the fifth time! My fingers are cooked through."

Light vanished, but the momentary picture left its impression on the retina. For seconds, though his eyes were shut, Jeff saw the golden masonry, and Cyprian in an aura that the shadows were closing in like floods to overwhelm.

"I've tried to wake him," said Jeremy. "I've pinched him. He don't move. But his respiration, temperature and pulse all seem about normal. Do you suppose he's hypnotized?"

"I know I've been poisoned," Jeff answered. "You'll have to pardon my bad French."

He vomited enormously; but even so, with that necessity off his mind, he could not remember what had happened.

"You were knocked over by a smell," said Jeremy. "It didn't get me."

That was swank unshriven—Jeremy, not long ago a victim of the hypnotist whom Ramsden slew, reasserting his equality. Subsubtly, from beneath, as memory always works, the salient points of recent history emerged into Jeff's consciousness, developed by the acid understanding that Jeremy had some need to assert himself.

"Wasn't I in a fight?" asked Jeff.

"No, old top. The other Johnny was. You won. Listen: King, Grim and the rest of 'em are prob'ly in our office in the Chandni Chowk, waiting for us. We're under the floor, and maybe under the cellar of Kali's temple. A lady runs the place whose hair needs combing—no, not cooties—snakes! She wears men's skulls for ornaments. Vamped 'em possibly. Our crowd hold one yellow-belly prisoner, and what with Narayan Singh and you we've killed a bag-full. Contrariwise, they've got us. My guess is we're safe enough as long as our crowd is alive and alert. But if they should burn half of Delhi in order to roast our folks alive, why then——"

"Why then you would be *spoorlos*,* wouldn't you!" said a voice in the dark, that was a man's, but for all the money in the world not Cyprian's.

Jeremy accepted that as an emergency and struck match one of the remaining six. A breath blew it out before it finished sputtering. He struck another, sheltering it between his hands. Eyes laughed at him, but a breath blew the match out before he could see the face that framed them. Nevertheless, he was nearly sure that breath and eyes belonged to different individuals. He struck a third match and Jeff prospected in his own way. Jeff's fist, launched not quite at random in the dark, hit some one hard and sent whoever it might be crashing backward against Cyprian's cot, upsetting man and cot together—waking Cyprian.

"Mercy, where am I? Light! Turn on the light!" said the old priest querulously. Memory failed him, too.

But a voice spoke like the resonances of a bronze bell, in a tongue that neither Jeremy nor Ramsden knew, and slowly—almost like the dawning of aurora borealis—soft light beginning dimly in a dozen places filled the crypt. It seemed to commence among corners and slowly to collect itself into a whole, until at last it framed

* Without a trace.

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nine individuals, the chief of whom in the center out-frowned all the others as a mountain dwarfs the hills. He was motionless, immense, a man who had attained the stark simplicity of elemental knowledge and a kind of power that goes with it. But for one thing he could have passed for a Mahatma—one of those pure embodiments of spirituality, who set the whole world first and themselves last, thus conquering the world. In his eyes there glared the cold heat of ambition. He was proud with the pride of Lucifer, who fell. Pride is the first of all foes that the Mahatma vanquishes, and so this individual's attainment, if prodigious, none-the-less was not good.

Compared to the man whom Jeff fought in the yard of the minaret he was as two to one. Even his physical strength seemed twice that of the former. In poise, calm, majesty of brow, and magnetism he more resembled one of those temple images that sit in the gloom and stare through eyes of amethyst, than any ordinary being. He looked aloof from human standards; yet—the hunger for human power burned in him, and could be felt.

His coppery skin shone, well groomed, although hardly clothed at all, and his muscles were like bronze castings. His smile was thick-lipped, but as static as the rest of him, as if it had been cast in place. On his forehead, under an orange-yellow turban, was the crimson caste-mark of the cruel goddess whom he chose to serve, but he wore no other ornament, nor any clothes except the yellow cloth twisted scantly on his loins. His feet were bare, and he sat with their soles turned upward in the attitude impossible, or at best a torture, to the western races.

"Bong!"

The word, if it was one, sounded like a hammer on bell-metal, producing overtones that hummed away into infinity. The eight who were with him hurried like supers betrayed by a rising curtain to straighten themselves into rigid attitudes on either hand—all except one, the woman. Jeremy knew her again, although the snakes and skulls were missing. Alone of all of them she sat irregular—apart from the exact arc of a circle that the others kept—like a picture of Herodias, lacking John Baptist's head just yet awhile. Lovely, if you love that kind of thing. Rich, ripe, full-lipped, with eyes of a challenging candor that had looked with curiosity and some amusement—but no pity—into more and worse evil that the rest of the world suspects there is. Sex-insolence robed in a leopard-skin.

SHE had jewels on most of her fingers, and on one toe what looked like a wedding-ring set with diamonds; but her nostril had not been pierced for the jeweled stud so much affected by Hindu women, and her earrings were not the usual drooping things but emeralds cut table-shape and set so that even the claws of the setting were invisible.

The others were seven men in yellow smocks, not remarkably different from those who had conducted the offensive hitherto, but possibly a mite more sure of themselves and a shade less anxious, consequently, to create impressions. Seven men so much alike in motive and self-discipline that a kind of graceless unity had settled on them, making of men of varying height and weight one pattern molded by unanimous desire.

"Who are these people? Where am I?" Cyprian demanded, sitting up.

Instead of answering, the bronze man in the midst pointed a finger at Jeremy and spoke in English—

"You and he, pick up that bed and set it down between you!"

The selected English in arrogant contempt of their disguise. By "he" he meant Ramsden. By obedience he intended to impose his will. The most imperial control must have beginning, and the hypnotist does not live—nor ever did—who can exert authority without by some means gaining first the victim's own consent.

Jeremy was done with being hypnotized.

"You go to ——!" he answered civilly in English.

"Ditto!"

Ramsden reenforced him with a gruff voice and a gesture like a gladiator's. He feared poison-gas much more than any mental trickery.

"Come over here, pop!" Jeremy said to Cyprian. "Try and walk."

Cyprian made the attempt, getting his feet to the floor and then thrusting himself up with both hands. He did not do badly. Jeff caught him before he tripped and fell,

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and set him down like a child between himself and Jeremy, where the old man shut his eyes after one hard look at the nine who faced him, leaning against Jeff's shoulder. He was conscious, for his lips were moving. He might have been memorizing a formula.

"Can you do this?" said Jeremy, smiling impudently into the face of the enemy's spokesman.

He avoided the woman's eyes. She had a long silk handkerchief that she plied between her fingers restlessly. He snatched it without looking at her, and went through the motions of the Thug-assassin, tossing the handkerchief at last into the lap of the immense man in the midst. It was the essence of disrespect—irreverence.

"Beat that if you can!"

The woman giggled. He who should have been respected spoke in an unknown language.

"*Bong!*" or so it sounded, and about eight other syllables. It was as startling as the gong that checks ten thousand horsepower in mid-turn.

Four of the nine got up and passed behind the pillars to their rear, returning in a minute with a wooden stretcher and a great weight on it. The woman giggled again.

"Look!" said the man in the midst, again in English.

But Jeremy had looked. His cue was disobedience. It did not interest him to con again the features of the man whom Jeff had fought and killed—whom he had made to sit up and seem to speak in the ox-cart.

"I get you!" he answered, laughing. "Who killed Cock-Robin? That it? Want to bet? I'll bet the man who took his number down can do the same to you! Come! Put your money up!"

Disobedience increasing into disrespect, was rising to Jeremy's head like wine. His voice and the little curt laugh betrayed it. Cyprian's old, lash-less eyes opened a trifle—hardly wider than walnuts at a Winter's end—and his lips ceased moving. When he spoke at last he had pulled himself together and there was the strength in his voice that is the accumulation of half a century's conceded deference. He spoke as one having authority—

"Peace in the presence of death!"

"I'm not joking, pop," said Jeremy; but the fumes were no longer rising. "Rammy can lick that blighter!"

"Peace!" commanded Cyprian.

He was still leaning against Ramsden's shoulder. Jeff's right arm was around his waist as if it had been a girl's. Depending on Jeff's grip the old man leaned forward—raised one finger—pointed at the bronze face opposite—opened his eyes wide at last. He seemed to be drawing deep on his reserves of strength.

"Peace! Do you hear me!" He was speaking English just as Jeremy had done. "As long as we are unaccounted for——"

It was the bronze man's turn to laugh. He and the woman rang a carillon like bells in tune. The seven smiled, as if the abyss in which their thoughts dwelt swallowed any sound they might have made.

"My brother!" said the bronze man simply, making a gesture toward the bier. The two words explained the whole of his attitude, although the word did not necessarily imply blood-relationship.

"Watch out you don't join him in Hell!" sneered Jeremy, bridling, repeating his curt, dry laugh—the danger signal.

So Cyprian reentered the lists, raising his head off Ramsden's shoulder.

"You do not dare!" he said, pointing a lean forefinger. And again he spoke English. "You have no occult power! You can harm no men who are awake. You are a weak thing—a poor thing—helpless—human flesh and blood! You are as helpless in the face of honesty as that!"

He pointed at the corpse. Wise, wise old Cyprian! Nine out of any ten religionists would have voiced some tenet of their creed, and so have given the enemy an opening into which to thrust the barbed darts of religious rivalry.

"You will never get my library," he went on. "Trustees have orders what to do with it. And if you harm me, can you pick the knowledge from my old dead brains?"

The woman laughed aloud. The man in bronze smiled triumphantly. Jeff Ramsden's arm closed around Cyprian, and Jeremy leaned forward, as if to interpose his own body between the old man and the shock that was trembling on cruel lips to be launched. News of the burning of his books was likelier than not to unhinge Cyprian. It was a bomb reserved to batter his defenses. Jeff forestalled it—drew the fuse.

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"Your books are up in smoke," he said. "Rather than let them carry even one away we——"

No need to finish the friendly lie. Cyprian understood that friends had been forehanded with the torch.

"All?" he demanded.

"Every last one," said Jeff.

"You *know* that?"

"Yes."

Cyprian stiffened himself, almost as if ten years were taken off his age.

"I am content. I have deserved it. It was pride that prevented me from burning them long ago. You are certain they are all gone?"

Then the old man bowed his head, and the enemy understood there was no more chance in that direction. There is little you can do in that way with a man who owns nothing and asks no more favors of the world. But you may threaten. He tried that next—

"At your age death without water——"

"Is easier than for you!" said Cyprian.

"At the mercy of ants——"

"God's creatures!" answered Cyprian. "I am old. I can face my end."

Or you may tempt—perhaps.

"We know much. You know a little. Add yours to ours, and we can track the Nine down."

Cyprian bent his head again, this time to hide a smile; but the woman saw it. She made some kind of signal to the man. Cyprian was elated. The double confession couched in ten words, that these, too, were hunting the Nine and did not even know their whereabouts, was like a breath of incense.

The man with the bronze smile read the woman's signal and appeared to be digesting it. He said nothing for about a minute. Then—

"We have a man who knows a member of the Nine by sight."

Jeff and Jeremy looked up, and down again, not daring to complete the exchange of glances. Even so, it was enough. The nine who watched all recognized the movement and interpreted it. The woman held her hands palm-downward about midway from her bosom to the floor and moved them outward in a motion that suggested levelling the earth for new erections.

"Your friends hold him prisoner!"

"You deduce that?" Cyprian asked, looking up with a swift bird-movement of the head.

Ignorant himself of whether it was true or not, he was afraid that Jeff or Jeremy might blurt out an admission. He knew better than to give away one scrap of information. Tell the enemy nothing. Concede nothing. Yield nothing. That was next to being his religion. That was why he bought up books on occultism and the secret sciences. It was part and parcel of him.

Jeff detected Cyprian's call for discretion sooner than Jeremy did. His slower wit was working at full power, plugging as it were against obscurity; whereas Jeremy, knowing himself the quicker, was leaping from one possibility to another. Jeremy, if left to it, would have tried to strike a bargain, leaving mother-wit to solve it when the time for double-crossing came. Jeff would have used force. What his mind was pondering, deliberately rather than obtusely, was: Why had he not been searched? The comfortable weights disposed beneath the ragged costume he was wearing were enough proof of the fact. Did these men, knowing not a shot had been fired in the long night's hurly-burly, simply deduce from that a lack of fire-arms? Were they so careless?

Jeff doubted it. There was another reason. Figuring the probabilities he guessed that only two or three had captured him and Jeremy with the aid of gas, and had been glad enough to get them under lock and key until the others came. But they would hardly dare use gas again with their own unprotected persons in the crypt. Not very swiftly, but as surely as he sets his feet when walking, Jeff reviewed the argument, and then, as if the wound beneath a bandage hurt him, shifted his position.

Jeremy was on another track. He wanted to know what they knew, unlike Jeff, who did not care and only wanted to be out of it. A jest died still-born on his lips. It would have suited his sense of fitness to make that dead man speak again, and Cyprian, aware of indiscretion in the air, shook nervously.

But he with the bronze smile realized that nothing he had said or done had brought the prisoners nearer to the right subjective state in which he could impose his will on them. And he lost patience.

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Time seemed to be an element in his immediate affairs, and the woman kept making signals that impressed the others, if not him. Suddenly he moved—about six inches—leaning forward and thrusting his hands in front of him as if they were serpents' heads.

"You — three — may — not — live — longer — than — you — can — endure *Her* — agonies — unless — you — choose — to — be — of — use!" he said.

Each word was separate—almost as if etched—spoken in English with an accent learned at one or other of the universities. And at the word "Her" his eyes met the woman's, as if she were the expert in applied torment.

"The younger shall be hurt first. The older shall look on," he said as if it were an afterthought.

"How be of use?" asked Jeremy.

"Like this!" said Jeff; and he was on his feet before the words had shaped themselves.

He could be quick when thought's slow processes had ground out a conclusion. Loosing hold of Cyprian he leaped at the woman and had thrown her into Jeremy's lap before Cyprian's shoulders hit the floor.

"Hang on to her!" he yelled.

AND then, with every sinew aching from the former fight, he launched himself straight at the man in the middle, landing on his neck before a man could move to his assistance. One tenth of a second then would have been plenty for the whole of Jeff's plan to go up in smoke like Cyprian's library, but he was squandering no tenths. With a hand on the back of the neck of his enemy he hurled him forehead-forward to the stone floor—stunned him. And as the seven sprang to assist their chief Jeff dragged him out from under them, cuffing two into unconsciousness and knocking another into the discard somewhere behind the pillars. Then at last he drew his automatic pistol, and throwing his back against a pillar stood at bay, with a foot on the bronze man's stomach and the pistol muzzle threatening him.

"Are you heeled?" he called to Jeremy.

But Jeremy had his hands too full for any such issue as a gun. He had the daughter of the Ohms to wrestle with. A trapped leopard with the smell of the forest in her lungs would have been a toy compared to her. No python ever wrapped and unwrapped coiling energy so fast, nor struck so swiftly. She was strength and hate and savagery all compressed into the heart of charged springs, and a knife in each hand made her no whit easier to overcome. What was worse, Jeff had only knocked out three of the seven. Four were on their feet and fancy-free—it might be they were doubly dangerous for lack of the control the man in their midst had exercised before Jeff laid him out.

Jeremy with his knee in the woman's stomach twisted one wrist until she dropped that knife with a scream of anger. But her right wrist was stronger than his left, and her stomach muscles could resist his knee. She slipped out from under him and kicked the fallen knife. One of the seven pounced on it, and Jeff shot him dead before he could raise his hand to drive the blade into Jeremy.

But that was not Jeff's plan. Noise, that might bring help was likelier to bring more enemies. Gas was what he feared. As long as there were living followers of Kali in the crypt it was hardly likely their friends would turn the gas on. He wished the giant under his foot would show signs of life. If Jeremy should kill the woman and he should shoot all the others there would probably be a greater risk of gas than ever.

But Destiny was overturning. They were down inside the works. Like a pair of interwoven springs released Jeremy and the woman fought in spasms, she using teeth and he his fists at last—for how else should a man release his biceps from unyielding jaws? The underlings in yellow lurked behind pillars for their opportunity, as likely as not possessed of firearms and afraid to use them yet lest Jeff should finish off their chief. The woman, for a second mastering Jeremy, writhed close to a pillar. Jeff decided he must shoot her—just as two men moved—the man under his foot and Cyprian. Both moved at once—spoke—used the same word—

"Cease!"

Then:

"Don't shoot again. Put up your weapon," ordered Cyprian.

He under Jeff's foot shouted something at the woman in a tongue that not even Cyprian understood, and she, with a last

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dynamic dig with her knife at Jeremy's right eye, laughed and relaxed, so that Jeremy scattered his strength and she slipped away from him before he could recover. She had the knife poised for throwing, with the haft against the heel of her hand and her elbow well back, when Jeff coughed and her eye looked down the barrel of his automatic. Jeremy laughed and took the knife and thanked her for it, in return for which she spat so nearly straight into his mouth that he could neither eat nor drink for days without remembering it.

And all that while the light—the pale, cool, unexplained light that had started in a dozen places and appeared to join itself together into one—had continued steadily, casting no shadow in their midst but leaving all the outer portions of the crypt in darkness.

It began to grow dim; not at once, but gradually, as it once came, resolving into separate mysteries, each withdrawing, and each growing less. Jeremy went for the woman again, but she laughed, escaping his clutches easily, mocking him and as the light waned focussing her thought on Cyprian. It was as obvious as the increasing dimness that when darkness came Cyprian was due for her attentions.

So Jeff Ramsden, feeling that his plan was no good after all—but game until the gods should hoist his number—bent his knee rather than his shoulders and seized the man beneath him by the wrist.

"Come close, you two! Quick!"

Cyprian and Jeremy obeyed him, in a twilight so dim now that the pillars of the crypt resembled tree-trunks in a forest, and the shadows moving in among them, ghosts.

"Tie this man, Jeremy!"

So Jeremy took the girdle from Cyprian's black soutane and kneeling on the bronze man lashed his wrists behind him so that nothing less than sharp steel might set them free again.

"Let me go. I'm going to turn you out of here," the man protested.

"I know you are!" Jeff answered.

As he spoke, in front of him, somewhere among the deepening pillar-shadows, an arm moved swiftly and a knife struck the pillar behind him half an inch above his head. The woman's laugh rang ghostly like a pixie's in the forest, but the broken blade fell on Jeff's trussed prisoner and buried itself in the flesh of his arm. He cursed, and the woman left off laughing. Jeff took aim at where her laugh had seemed to have its origin, and fired. The pistol-flash, like lightning in the night, showed nothing but the pillars—and a gloom beyond—and no less than a dozen faces over yellow smocks, all waiting in the outer dark for *something* to begin.

"I've four shots left and no spares. Where's yours?" Jeff asked Jeremy.

There was no answer, but the sound of a struggle—strangling it might be—then of heavy breathing through the nose—and—

"*Bong!*"

It was the same word in an unknown tongue that had produced obedience before. But it was not the same man using it. It may be that a man with all his wits about him and no other care to subdivide attention might have detected mis-pronunciation. But there was much to think of. Expectation held its breath. It was pitch-dark now.

Jeremy, feeling for Jeff's hand, guided it to the prisoner's mouth, not speaking. Jeff felt a gag made of a turban end, and understood; his two immense hands closed on the victim's jaws, and the gag was tightened into place and held there by a pistol-butt. Nevertheless, the voice of the bronze man once more broke the silence—speaking English with an accent learned at one or other of the Universities—each word separate.

"Good. You—have—won—this—bout. It—is—conceded. Go—free. Your—three—lives—in—exchange—for—mine. My—men — will — show — you — to — the — street—in—safety. Go—free."

Then Jeremy's voice—this time indubitably Jeremy's:

"All right, cocky! You come with us to the street as guarantee of good faith! And I want to understand each word you say. Feel the knife on your Adam's apple? It'll cut in halves the first word you use in any other than the English language! Now—give your orders!"

The voice changed to bell-metal.

"Lead them to the street and let them go. Let no harm touch them."

Jeremy's voice again, high-pitched and disrespectful, taking no man nor his makings seriously:

"We've ten shots and a knife to keep our

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end up with. We'll croak you at the first hitch!"

Bell-metal again:

"Make haste! The day increases. Lead them to the street."

"In darkness!" ordered Jeremy. "No light to see to shoot us by!"

"In darkness!" said the bell obediently.

There was movement somewhere—almost inaudible footfalls. Then a voice at a little distance, speaking in Punjabi—

"This way—come!"

Jeremy gathered up Cyprian, who leaned back in the hollow of his arm reserving all strength for emergency. Jeff, holding the gag firmly with the pistol-butt, seized the prisoner's neck in fingers like a vise and put such pressure on the jugular and carotid as answered all objections in advance. Together, in an eight-legged group like a spider treading warily, they started for the voice, each touching each—Jeff's strength as taut and alert as dynamite with fuse attached.

"All is well. Keep coming!" said the same voice.

"All 'ud better be well!" remarked Jeremy. "We've got your chief. He gets it first remember!"

Whoever controlled that mysterious light obeyed the order to keep it turned off. That made discovery impossible, but eased no nerves. A dozen times the giant whom Jeff was dragging writhed in a sudden effort to eject the gag; and many more than a dozen times between the middle of the crypt and a door set somewhere in its invisible circumference they drew in breath believing they were attacked.

"This way, *sahibs!*" the voice kept calling, too sugar-sweetly to be free from guile; and they kept following, too fearful to refuse. Time and again they cannoned into pillars, as if whoever led them was boxing the compass in a calculated effort to confuse.

"The door in less than ten steps, or I shoot!" said Jeremy at last.

THE click of the slide of his automatic as he tested it confirmed the threat. But they were at the door. He tripped over a step that instant. And if Jeff had not needed his pistol-butt for forcing home the gag there would have been an all-betraying flash—and only India's gods know what next. Jeff used his fist instead—letting go his prisoner, swinging with all his weight behind a left-hand hay-maker, and hitting he never knew what. It vanished along with what might have been a feminine scream cut short. When he swung again there was nothing there.

"Come on!" said Jeremy, and—

"This way, *sahibs!*" said the voice.

They mounted invisible steps and came to a ramp sloping upward between stone walls. It seemed to curve around the circumference of three parts of a circle, and they took each step with shoulders against the wall, prospecting carefully with a foot in advance for fear of traps. Once, when they had mounted for as many minutes as was possible without giving vent to emotion, Jeremy stopped in the lead and forced himself to breathe steadily a dozen times. Then, obtaining self-command:

"Remember! No lights!" he called out in the bell-metal voice.

"No lights! This way, *sahibs!*" came the answer.

Once or twice bats struck them in the face, but there was no other opposition until a great door creaked on heavy hinges and a darkness something less opaque announced that they were in the temple. It was still impossible to see a hand outstretched a yard before the eyes; but there was another quality to darkness, and the echo changed. The door to the street was shut. They knew it must be daylight, but there was nothing to prove it—not a crack that the faintest ray shone through.

But there was noise. Something—a man by his breathing—labored at a bolt, or it might be at a swinging bar that held the outer door shut. He muttered at his work.

"Krishna!" was perfectly distinct—not a word you would expect in Kali's temple, she having little in common with the god compassionate.

There was the sound of hoofs—in itself no startling circumstance, for they let the sacred bulls pass freely in and out of many Hindu temples. But the squeak of un-oiled wheels was added to it; and if that meant anything it was that the dust of unclean streets had defiled a sacred floor. Dust on a bull's feet is one thing; on wheels another.

He who had led the way out of the crypt drew breath between his teeth and called to his chief in the secret tongue for orders.

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Jeff set his back against the heavy door to hold it open, Cyprian whispered something neither heard, and Jeremy took chances at a venture. He answered in Punjabi, in the bronze voice:

"I will see these to the street. Return, thou, and call the others to attend to this when these have gone!"

That certainly was vague enough. But it covered as much of the facts as anybody knew, and there was no need to explain why the chief did not answer in the sacred tongue. How should he dare be misunderstood by the men who held him as their hostage?

The guide seemed disciplined until his own will was an automatic agent of obedience. He turned with a rutching of bare feet on stone and started back. Invisible, he sought the invisible door unerringly, and Jeff—invisible as either, and as ignorant of what might happen next as any one on earth—played by ear, as a musician might, for the peak of the man's jaw as he passed. He hit it, which was a miracle. He sent him stunned down the dark ramp, spinning on his heels and falling backward; and the heavy door shut tight on him before the echo of the blow had ceased.

"My aunt!" said a voice in English. "Now is Winter of a babu's discontent! *O tempora! O mores!*"

The belaboring of fists on iron was resumed as if in panic.

"To the last man and the last rupee—and then the deluge!" said the same voice.

The beating on the outer door redoubled—something like the fluttering of a moth against a window-pane, but heavier.

"Chullunder Ghose!"

"O gods whom I have mocked, am I in hell? Who knows my name?"

"Strike a match, Jeremy!"

The light, as the sound of its striking, was nearly swallowed in the blackness of a domed roof. But a few rays showed two oxen in the shafts of a two-wheeled covered cart, one standing and the other lying down, while a fat man humped against the temple door shielded his eyes with a forearm.

Jeff laughed, and Jeremy heaped swift conclusions into one mess to be brushed away:

"Selling out to the enemy? Double-crossing us? Got captured? What's the secret, babu-ji?"

"They greet me with an insult! Oh my elements! A Frenchman would have fallen on my neck! This Anglo-Saxon race is ——"

"—in a hurry!" Jeremy cut in. "Omit the captions—spill beans!"

"*Are* spilt! *Any one* can pick up same! Was suitably engaged in losing ox-cart—uncamouflaged and less amenable to shrinkage than well fed elephant or long-distance cannon. Very exercised in mind—*verb. sap.* Could neither sell nor give away same for obvious motives. Hyena-headed *shroff** approached clandestinely refused to lend even small sum on such security without proof of ownership. Same being *non est* in legal verbiage, sought to leave oxen straying in public thoroughfare. Brute beasts, having appetites, refused to be lost, and followed lone acquaintance—me!—presumably on off-chance. Most perplexing! Prayed! Not often efficacious, gods who are neglected in between-times continuing stand-offish in emergency as working rule. Nevertheless, bright notion burst bomb-like on imagination. Bring outfit here! Deposit same in midst of enemy, decamping forthwith. Off-shoulder burden of responsibility in lap of adversary, handicapping same! No sooner said than attempted—came here—door open—drove in—caught by curiosity was urged by inner impulses to forage, being poor babu with family in need of aliment. Shut temple-door accordingly in fear of observation from without. Immediately all was dark! Panic! Terror-stricken! Sought to open door again and failed! O God, what shall we do?"

Jeff Ramsden felt his way to the temple-door and groped for the fastenings.

"Where are our friends?" he asked.

"Presumably in office wondering what next! Oh, we are in the wrong place for solaces of friendship! O my God, what next!"

Jeremy, groping, lifted Cyprian into the ox-cart and asked him to stay in there. Ramsden discovered the trick of the door-fastening and set his strength against a spring that held a beam in place. It yielded inch by inch.

"Pull on the door!" he grunted.

Chullunder Ghose obeyed and in another second sat down hard on the stone floor, blinded by inrushing light. The street outside was bathed in the early sunshine, and a loiterer or two—the usual beggars

* Money lender.

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and the usual social nondescripts—turned to observe what might be. The least commotion would have brought a crowd wondering. Whatever was to be done must be commonplace—as calm and apparently in keeping with ancient precedent as all the other unnoticed extravagances of a land of paradox.

Jeff glanced behind him, screwing his eyes up to penetrate the gloom.

"Chuck the prisoner in!"

"Leave him!" urged Jeremy.

Jeff strode into the dark, felt the prisoner with his toe, gathered him up, and hove him like a sack of potatoes in through the embroidered curtains.

"Chullunder Ghose! Get in and sit on him!"

The babu knew better than to disobey. Jeff in that mood is force in motion, not to be turned aside or made to cease.

"Jeremy! Walk in front!"

Jeremy looked once at him, no more afraid of Jeff than of the oxen, yet aware of something else. The idea that had caught Jeff Ramsden in its orbit and was using him as steam can use the locomotive, was irresistible. He grinned, saluted impudently, turned on his heel, and led the way, the rents that the woman had made in his yellow smock making him look more than ever like a member of India's great uncounted and unquestioned beggar-holy-men.

Jeff, with a tail in each hand and his toes at work, tooled the ox-cart carefully out through the temple-door, leaving it gaping wide behind him, not once looking back, assuming to the best of his ability the expression of bored insolence that sits so often on the faces of men who deal with privilege. Even his voice as he cried to the oxen (that refuse to go unless they hear agony) had the tired note of second-hand sanctity. The ox-cart bumped over the cobbles. The splendid, hungry brutes helped themselves at random from frequent sacks of grain beneath the street-side awnings, and from infrequent carts—objurgated, but indifferent from long use. Jeremy reproved with time-worn proverbs some one who kicked the off-side bullock in the mouth for too bold robbery. All was well; or all seemed well, until from behind embroidered curtains at Jeff's back Chullunder Ghose piped up again.

"Not knowing plans, not offering to pass on same. Respectfully advise attention, nevertheless! In Chandni Chowk and environments this ox-cart will be as invisible as elephants in Pall Mall! Ford car might pass through unnoticed. Airplane would not cause comment. We are antique anachronism, subject to inquisitive police and mockery of youthful element. I urge judiciousness! Moreover, of two religious personages in my charge, one peeps through the curtains at the rear and the other chokes as if the gag were disagreeing with him. On which one shall I sit?"

It was Father Cyprian who solved that riddle—he who eased the gag in the prisoner's mouth in time to prevent asphyxiation, and he who whispered to Jeff through the front curtains, annoying Chullunder Ghose, who yearns to enjoy full confidence in everything.

"I have seen a friend of mine—Bhima Ghandava by name. I did not know he was in India. He must have just returned from his travels. We shall be safe in his house."

"Who is he? Will he admit us?" Jeff objected. Jeff's mind was bent on another course, and he yielded ungracefully.

"Yes, he will admit us. He will hide this cart. He is my friend."

"Which way?"

Jeff drove his toe under the tail of the near ox, crying like a sea-bird in the gale's lee, and they changed direction, leaving Jeremy to walk the middle of a street alone until he turned of his own accord and took the situation in. Thereafter he strove to follow with dignity, as he had led with grace.

They wended time-hallowed streets, avoiding the great thoroughfares and hunting quiet as the homing pigeon goes. There might have been a compass under the naked crown of Cyprian's head. And at last they reached a wide teak gate in a high wall at an alley's end, where Cyprian, reaching from the ox-cart, pulled a brass chain. Eyes scrutinized them through an iron grill.

"Can you entertain us? Have you a messenger?" asked Cyprian. And a voice with a smile in it answered in English:

"Why certainly. Welcome! Come in!"

Then some one rattled iron bars, and the great gate swung inward to admit them.

TO BE CONTINUED

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THE MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE

by **E. A. Brininstool**

ONE of the greatest blots upon the history of the West was the bloody Mountain Meadows Massacre in September, 1857, at a spot about three hundred miles south of Salt Lake City, Utah. Here, an emigrant train, *en route* to California, composed of one hundred and thirty-six men, women and children, was ambushed by Indians, assisted by a delegation of Mormons disguised as Indians, headed by the notorious John D. Lee. Every person in the train was killed, with the exception of seventeen children under seven years of age.

The emigrants had attempted, after leaving Salt Lake City, to purchase food and supplies, but without success. It was alleged by the Mormons that while *en route* to Salt Lake City the emigrants had committed various depredations, according to Lee's confession, although no reliance could be placed upon his statements.

It was on September 5th, 1857, that the emigrants reached Mountain Meadows, about thirty miles southwest of Cedar, between two ranges of hills, with ravines on either side of the camp. The following day being the Sabbath, they rested, as had been their custom since leaving their Eastern homes.

At daybreak on the 7th, while their campfires were being lighted, the train was fired upon by Indians, or Mormons disguised as Indians, and over twenty persons were killed or wounded. The survivors formed a corral of their wagons and remained in a state of siege four days. The fifth day John D. Lee entered the camp under the pretense that he had brought a company of militia to their rescue.

Lee played his part so well that he persuaded the unsuspecting emigrants to pile their arms in one of the wagons to "avoid provoking the Indians," and leave the corral under the supposed guard of the "militia." There is ample proof, however, that the whole affair was deliberately planned and carried out in accordance with a program previously arranged.

The emigrants were marched some distance from the wagons, in which the sick and wounded had been left, and at a given signal the slaughter commenced. Most of the men were shot down at the first fire. Only three escaped from the valley, and two were quickly run down and killed, while the third was overtaken and slaughtered fifty miles distant.

The women and children ran forward when the firing commenced, and they were surrounded by the Indians, among whom were Mormons in disguise. In vain they pleaded for their lives. None were spared the tomahawk or knife, save the seventeen children under the age of seven years.

The massacre was now complete, and Lee and his associates went to breakfast, returning after a hearty meal to bury the dead. The bodies were all dragged to a near-by ravine and piled in heaps; only a little earth being scattered over them, which was washed away at the first rain, leaving the remains to be devoured by wolves and coyotes.

The juvenile survivors of the awful massacre were placed in charge of Mormon families at Cedar, Harmony and elsewhere. All of them were recovered in the Summer of 1858, save one, who was rescued a few months later.

The Mormons concerned in the massacre had pledged themselves to stand by each other and always to insist that the deed was done entirely by Indians, and for several months such was supposed to be the case; but United States officials procured sufficient evidence to bring murder charges against some of the parties implicated, although it was not until 1876 that Lee was tried and convicted of first-degree murder; several other prominent Mormons who had also been arraigned for trial being discharged.

Lee made a confession a few days before his execution, in which he tried to throw the blame on his accomplices, and to show that the massacre was committed by order of Brigham Young and the high council. Lee, on March 23, 1877, faced a firing-squad on the very spot where the massacre was committed.

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CONTRARY MEN

by BARRY SCOBEE

Author of "The Rain," "Leaden Laughter," etc.

JOHNSON was the most contrary and most contemptuous man in the Southwest. And the most friendless. And he was a young man too.

He sat on the foot of his iron cot in the county jail feeding piña nuts to Aunt Polly, his gnarled old she parrot, and spitting tobacco-juice through a harness-ring suspended by a string six feet away.

"Good shot!" Polly would applaud hoarsely as if each hissing expectoration were a signal.

Occasionally Johnson's big, lithe body would shake from interior laughter. He was feeling pretty good this morning, for it was the day of his release. And he had a trick to spring.

The harness-ring would hardly have let a two-bit piece through. But as it slowly turned and swayed on the end of its string, there in the barred window, Johnson's mobile lips expertly shot the juice through and seldom moistened the target.

"Good shot!" would come Aunt Polly's croak.

Johnson's right cheek bagged pouchily with his cud, and the lower lip sagged, giving his face a most remarkable mocking, mirthful expression. Dark and lean, and with Aunt Polly on one shoulder, he looked like an old-time pirate of the high seas.

Presently the sheriff waddled across the yard from the court-house and as he approached called out querulously—

"Thought I told you to quit that spittin' through them bars on to the path?"

"Didja?" casually responded the prisoner.

"You know I did!"

"Sure; but I got to practise."

"But—but—" stammered the fat and harassed officer.

Johnson chuckled his slow, shoulder-heaving, "Huh-huh-huh!" that made men see red.

Sheriff Meal carried a great rotund paunch in front of him. When the outer circumferance of this touched the heavy steel outer door he reached around to unlock. Johnson was the only inmate in the little bastile. At the rattle of the key he strode to the door and waited for it to swing back, the yellow-and-green parrot on his left shoulder. Meal opened the door a reluctant two feet.

"Your three months ain't up till ten o'clock this forenoon by all rights," he complained grudgingly. "For a little or nothing I wouldn't release you till then, just for your three months of impudence."

The officer's outer and under shirt, stretched over his expanding girth, gaped between buttons. White skin, hair-lined delicately, was exposed to the public. Johnson reached out a sharp finger-nail and scratched the bare spot playfully.

"You puffer fish!" he chided.

"You—you——"

The officer was gaspingly indignant.

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"Whsssst! Be careful what you say. Women. The jail committee."

Meal waddled around, wisely blocking the door, however, with his body. Three women were right at hand, highly respectable-looking. The sun came out from behind the clouds on the sheriff's face, and he began to beam politely.

"We understand," said one of the women, "that that man Johnson gets out this morning."

"Yes, ma'am, yes, ma'am," acknowledged the bobbing sheriff. "Just one moment, please."

The officer began to pivot around. The plump fingers of his right hand were trotting around over the dome of his abdomen trying to locate the gap he felt must be there in his shirt. The women were watching a bit fascinatedly. Sheriff Meal stepped back and waited for Johnson to step out.

"Well!" he said pompously.

So Johnson stood stock still contrarily.

"I know the dear people of west Texas are panting for my liberty," he drawled, "but——"

"Like they panted for your dad's liberty while he was in the pen," sneered Meal in sudden exasperation.

"Huh-huh-huh!" chuckled Johnson, the mirth of his face mocking the officer.

"Huh-huh-huh!" mimicked Meal in helpless vexation.

Johnson drew the tobacco-juice from the bag of his cheeck to the pouch of the lip, in front of his tongue, and shot a stream straight at the gap of the sheriff's shirt.

"Good shot!" croaked Polly.

Sheriff Meal slapped his hand over the spot. The women's faces took on horrified shapes. Sheriff Meal raised his hand above the edge of the horizon and regarded it with consternation.

"My ——!" he cried shrilly. "He must 'a' spit a South Sea dart or something. I'm bleedin'."

He kicked the door, sent it swinging to. He walked against it with all his weight and clicked it shut. Then he and three outraged ladies streaked it for the court-house.

"By-by," called Polly sweetly.

Johnson went back to the bunk and resumed target practise. This was the new trick he had to spring. And Aunt Polly sat on his shoulder and murmured affectionately.

She was a wise old bird—so old that time had put scales on her legs more thickly than on any barnyard rooster's. Johnson had brought her from Paris, but she spoke English in an amazingly wide vocabulary. She was forever piping something new.

AT PRECISELY ten o'clock Deputy Sheriff Medhurst crossed the yard and unlocked the heavy door.

"You ever get in here again," he said, "we'll throw the key away."

"Baaa!" went Johnson like a goat.

"The sheriff said for you to go straight home to that hill-billy shack of yours."

"I'll stay in town a week then."

Johnson stepped outside, the bird on his shoulder. It was the first free breath for three months, the first time the sun had shone straight on him. He looked aloft. He inhaled deeply. But in this first instant of freedom there was something to foil his enjoyment—a big group of men and women in front of the court-house.

"What's that?" he asked sharply, a touch of apprehension in his voice.

"They're not there to welcome you," retorted the deputy. "This is primary election day."

Johnson remembered then. He could see the people looking toward him. At once two men broke away and hurried forward, then three more. Johnson went forward too. And when they were yet some distance apart one of the five called out—

"Hey, you, come here!"

"You come here," answered Johnson, stopping in his contrary way.

A crowd always flurried Polly at first. She began to scream.

"Shoot 'em! Shoot 'em! Leeward, you lubber! My daughter, oh, my daughter! Forward, hep! Shut up, you fool!"

"Hey," asked one of the men, "how you voting today?"

"Who wants to know?" responded Johnson.

"Nobody wants to know. But we want to tell you your friend Hugo Lane is running for prosecuting attorney again."

There was a laugh at this "your friend."

"Reckon you know how to vote there, Johnson. We got to defeat him this time."

"Not that we have any more use for you," another of the party asserted harshly, "than we have for him, but a vote against him is a vote against him."

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"Reckon I'll vote for him," said Johnson, and he turned and swung off in the opposite direction.

No buildings intervened between the jail and the open country. He walked the distance of two town blocks to a pasture gate, and to his shrill whistle a little strawberry roan mare came trotting up.

"Hello, Rosy, old girl," he greeted affectionately.

He stroked and petted her.

"Three months is a long time, ain't it? Long for you and me and Aunt Polly—all the friends we got."

He mounted bareback and without a bridle. For a moment he was undecided; then with a piratical, daredevil glint he chose to ride toward the crowd of men and women voters congregated before the courthouse. He galloped, he went in a whirl of August dust, the little roan veering her course according to the sway of his body.

"Whoopee!" he shouted, and went tearing straight up to the crowd.

Some cried out, some crowded back. He brought the mare to a sliding stand, with men glaring up at him under her very muzzle. His face sagged with its sinister expression of mockery—a grinning gargoyle who looked them over eye for eye. They stared back half-fascinated at him.

When he picked out Hugo Lane, the prosecutor, his glance lighted up with satiric amusement.

"Come here!" he commanded.

The prosecutor, with obvious reluctance to become the target of this leering man before the crowd, followed the lane that opened for him. One or two persons gave low warnings to beware of Johnson.

The prosecutor's outstanding characteristic was a pair of thin, crooked, cruel lips in a face that looked to be as round as a dollar.

"You, Johnson," he called out as he came forward, "don't you try any shenanigans. You haven't got a friend in the county."

"Hugo to ——!" retorted Johnson with a pun he had used on other occasions. "Friends? I don't need 'em to keep me from gettin' hurt."

He and Lane glared at each other. Johnson's face assumed an incredibly mirthful mockery. He moistened his lips to make them supple. He squeezed the available supply of tobacco-juice to the pouch of his lower lip, gathered it neatly before the tongue as was his practise, and squirted straight as a bullet.

The squirt was aimed at the right eye of the prosecuting attorney, but Lane saw it coming in time. He threw forward his hand, palm out, like a shield, and stopped the brown stream.

"Good shot!" croaked Polly.

Lane stood frozen, his right arm elevated and extended, as if pushing against a brick wall, an expression of utter horror on his countenance.

"I'll say so!" parroted the restless bird. "Where do we go from here?"

The crowd broke into a howl of laughter —or half of it did, Lane's enemies.

Lane wiped his hand on a clean white handkerchief. He was white and coldly furious.

"You scum!" he flared, low-voiced. "If I had a gun I would shoot you down like a dog!"

"Somebody loan him a gun—some of my friends in the crowd," sneered the heckler.

He guffawed, not because he was particularly amused but to torment the lawyer further.

"Look here, you," he started on another tack. "You sent my dad to the pen for two years, and it killed him when I was off to war. Sent him because he slapped yo' face for you."

"Because he killed Woodstock's cattle," corrected Lane, afraid of votes.

"Because he told you to go to ——."

"Because he broke the law."

"Because he couldn't see yo' insignificant soul. Because you saw him as stubborn and contrary and contentious, when it was you that was that way. And now you're startin' in on me. Three months in jail because I walked across the corner of a rich man's land."

"And left his gates open purposely time after time."

Johnson huh-huhed at this derisively, just to irritate, and added—

"After he set his dogs on my goats."

"Enough of this," interrupted a man in the throng. "This is a shameful attack on an official of the county. Johnson, you need a horse-whipping!"

"Why don't you give it to me?"

In the stillness Johnson leered at them with scarcely a physical movement, and

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chuckled in a way to make them see red.

"Hang him!" muttered a voice.

"Get a rope!" somebody shouted.

And at this the crowd turned into a mob. Above the shouting for tar and feathers and the cries of "Knock him off his horse," and the like, Polly screamed at the top of her raucous voice.

"My daughter, oh, my daughter! Throw me a biscuit! Play ball! Where's the comb?"

A mob, but a mob a little afraid of getting spit on. Johnson sat his pony, which had neither saddle nor bridle, with the indolent ease of a Plains Indian, his thumbs hooked into his breeches pockets, incredible contempt on his face—a dangerous statue of poise and fearlessness and *superiority*.

As he sat thus he heard from out of the uproar the voice of an old man telling another, down by the mare's flank—

"He's the first man I ever saw absolutely without a friend."

Johnson had been a good man in the Army, had been a sergeant. He had friends there, knew the meaning of pals. The old man's words smote him, cut like acid. He had heard the statement more than once, but to hear it as one man to another drove it home.

Hugo Lane had not moved, but had stood square in front of the pony, in the tracks where the great insult had been offered, still white with anger, debating his revenge. And now he spoke.

"Johnson," he blared, shaking a fist, "you've got to get out of the country! You've got to go, —— —— you, if I have to run you out single-handed!"

The people, who had somewhat hushed, broke out again in yells of approval.

Johnson sneered, and laughed his slow, "Huh-huh-huh!"

He possessed an indefinable quality of courage, of leadership. It had shone in the Army. It gave him coolness now. And protected him. Perhaps it was that *superiority*, that subtle show of power, that kept their mob hands off him. Perhaps it was sheer admiration at his flaunting. Possibly it was goodness in their hearts.

And then he added the final insult.

He squeezed juice from the sag of his cheek to the pouch of his lip, deftly as was his wont, and, stretching up and forward, spat out over Hugo Lane and the crowd for twenty feet, so that the brown line of juice lay like a rope across the attorney's up-turned face, and across hats and faces beyond.

Then he laughed that slow, maddening chuckle—

"Huh-huh-huh!" And, chuckling, he swayed his reinless mount away with his lithe body and rode off.

II

THERE are in the Davis Mountains of western Texas, on the mile-high peaks, vistas between tall pine-trees that flow off sixty or seventy miles to other mountain-clumps blue or hazy in the distance, or with the white sunshine cutting them clearly—precious scenes to those who love the country.

Just such a view was the constant outlook from Johnson's vertically boarded shack in a grassy nook high up in the range. And he rode the strawberry roan along the road, then the narrow trail, with a tug of eagerness to be there.

Yet there was something else, another sense, that rode in the saddle with him, a sense of something amiss. It was conjured up by the words of the old man—

"He's the first man I ever saw absolutely without a friend."

Johnson had had friends in the Army, stanch and true comrades, and had been a friend to others through thick and thin, through battle and mud and hell. He knew something was wrong with the man who did not have friends—or something wrong with the other crowd, his neighbors.

He pulled up his mount, moved by an impulse to ride back to the village and apologize, tell the people he wanted to be friendly, ask for their friendship, so that he could call the men John and Bill and Med. This craving for friendship held him tense for a moment; then he sagged down and slung out a mighty oath of contempt for such weakness and rode on. But the thought of not having friends kept nagging him.

These itchings were forgotten, however, at sight of his house, his home that he had been kept away from for twelve weeks. His face brightened; Rosy neighed softly, and Aunt Polly began to jabber.

He took in every detail—water trickling from a pipe-end from the spring above; white, long-haired Angora goats lying

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around the half-barrel; a squirrel scampering across the grass; a pine branch brushing the roof of the house, the whisper of which had sent him to peaceful sleep a thousand times.

The goats, so long without a human being around, rose up *en masse* with the muffled bony rattle of their hoofs and scampered away.

At his enforced leave in the custody of Deputy Sheriff Medhurst Johnson had simply closed the two doors of the shack. They were still shut. He dismounted eagerly and stepped to the porch, to the door; and then with a hand on the catch he paused. Something in his thought wiped the sneer from his countenance, and he faced around with a reverence glowing over him, and surveyed the landscape.

Cathedral Mountain, forty, fifty miles southeast; a blue-gray clump sixty, seventy miles southwest across a rolling tableland white under the noon sun. The pine trunks that framed the picture straight and graceful. A cool breeze.

"God!" he exclaimed humbly. "All this is a friend anyhow!"

Just within the cabin he paused to look around. There was a dry mustiness. Nothing apparently had been touched. He went to the kitchen and opened the back door. Curled, chip-like pancakes lay on the table. In jail he had wondered whether he had left them there. The house was as neat and clean as a soldiers' barracks.

When Johnson returned from the war he had scrubbed the place from the dimmest corner to the ceiling and had whitewashed it. He had kept up the practise of shaving every other day. He had even thought of ceasing the use of tobacco, for cleanliness' sake. The place looked good; it was good to be back again.

He put Polly on her perch and took his Army papers and other documents and clippings from a pocket and placed them in a box on the wall. Then he strode to a keg that held cornmeal. Plunging his hand down into the musty whiteness, he drew out a revolver.

The gun was a forty-four caliber, a heavy, bright thing. A tap of the muzzle on the window-sill knocked off the dry, powdery meal-dust. The gun was unharmed. It brought a grin at the memory of how it had got into the meal. He had asked Medhurst at the time of the arrest to allow him to hide it there.

"Nothing doing," replied the deputy. "But I'll hide it for you."

And he had worked it down into the meal, toward the bottom of the keg. He had asked for the ammunition, to hide it too. But Johnson had explained that all the ammunition he had, six cartridges, were in the cylinder.

"If Mexicans or a bear or something should jump you," Medhurst had observed, "you'd have to go clear down to the trading company to get you something to annoy 'em with, wouldn't you?"

Medhurst had been a good fellow, thought Johnson, but not a friend, or he would not have been afraid to trust Johnson to take up the revolver and hide it. And that was why Johnson grinned—a grin of resentment and contempt.

He "broke" the gun now, exposing the cylinder, and there was a flick of his lips, a flick of triumph, at sight of the six heavy cartridges. This was a friend that would stand by!

Johnson went to sleep on his bed that night to the music of the brushing bough on the roof and to the rasp of the old man's words in his thought—

"First man I ever saw absolutely without a friend."

The thing gnawed at the vitals of his mind.

But steadfast sleep was not his portion. Once a sound as of splashed water awakened him. He went to the porch and looked around. Polly, from the depth of her thickly covered cage, murmured dolorously. The night was moonlit and serene.

The only intruding thing was an odor of coal-oil. Johnson had filled his lamp at dark. He remembered he had spilled kerosene then.

He stood on the porch a moment in the thin, acidy mountain air, thinking how comfortable it would be to have a pal up here, a friend. Back in the sagging bed his heart warmed in kindly memory of those friends of the war, in the Argonne.

He awakened again with his eyes popping wide open. A spot on one wall was lighted dimly. At first he was not certain even of this, it was so slight. The explanation crossed his mind that a white goat outside the window was reflecting the moonlight to the wall. But this was not satisfactory. The light increased and moved.

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Johnson slid from the bed noiselessly, taking the heavy revolver from its nail conveniently on the wall.

Peering through the window, he stood transfixed. A stream of fire was trickling, flickering across the ground with the wind, from a boulder toward the house.

Johnson slid into his trousers and into his heavy shoes. He thought by flashes. He tiptoed to the door and scanned the immediate vicinity, for it was in his mind that somebody meant to drive him from his house by fire and assassinate him.

All at once flames covered the west end of the house with a *whoof*. The odor of kerosene was strong. He knew it was the splash of that liquid against the house that had disturbed him at first. And he knew that the house, dry as a dry August could make it, was doomed. Polly called out uneasily—

"Mother, does my petticoat show?"

He took up a warm mackinaw, stuffed his valuable papers from the box into a pocket, stuck on his gun in the empty belt and snatched the coverings off Polly's cage.

"Get out, you goats!" she screamed.

His big left hand tucked her under his arm, smothering her squawking. He leaped from the door, across the porch, to the protection of the big pine bole a dozen feet away.

To his surprize no shots came. No moving figures were visible. The trail began to the east, where it was dark. He dodged from boulder to boulder, working toward the trail-head to see if any one were making a get-away there. Then the fire burned up over the roof lighting up on all sides.

The light revealed two or three figures making for the trail. Johnson was fighting mad. They had set his house on fire. He shot twice. Two shots were fired in return.

Johnson leaped forward savagely, careless of danger. He thought of one thing—vengeance.

He kept on, reserving the four shots he had left until he should be closer. He kept expecting to be fired upon again. Nearer, he fired twice toward the trail-head, then once, and once again, lest the men should get away, and at the final shot a man yelled afrightedly:

"Wait! Help! He' got me!"

Then silence, save for the roar and crackle of the flames. Johnson went stooping from boulder to boulder to get away from the lighted area. With the empty gun he could only hide now, or try to learn the identity of his assailants.

He swung out, and down, and back to the trail below where the man had called out. There was an occasional groan. Polly began to claw and twist to get free. By lying flat Johnson was able to get the trail in silhouette against the fire. He made out a man on his knees by a tree, trying to pull himself up.

His impulse was to go to the man's aid, since there was no further firing and he seemed to be deserted. But this was quenched instantly at thought of his burning house.

A voice from the trail not far away calledout indistinctly, and a louder voice, Hugo Lane's, answered:

"Go back! Help him, you fool! He'll squeal on us! It won't do for Johnson to see me."

"You —— coward!" charged a voice that Johnson recognized as that of a town man named Harkins. "Blaney can cash in for all you care."

It was Blaney then that was shot—a sort of good-for-nothing odd-job man around Blue Mountain who took a great deal of glory in posing as a detective, his "work" consisting of spying among his neighbors and making trouble.

Harkins, grumbling rebelliously, began to make a cautious way back up the trail toward Blaney. The wounded man, groaning, called out again for help. Harkins appealed to Lane:

"Come on, Hugo. Don't ditch us now."

"I tell you I mustn't be seen!" flung Lane impatiently. "If we play this thing right I'll send Johnson to the pen for shooting Blaney. If he sees me— Go back and get Blaney."

"Yeah!" was Harkins' derisive disagreement.

"Johnson's probably busy at the house. Sure he is. Make a dash for it. Plug the —— tobacco-eater if you have to."

"If Johnson's back at the house why don't you come on and help me?"

At this moment Blaney made it to his feet and came staggering down the path. When he got nearer he could be heard sobbing. It came as a sort of shock to Johnson that he was the cause of it. But

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he forgot his enemies in remembering that Rosy's stable was dangerously close to the house. He hurried away, regardless of the men.

The cabin was thoroughly ablaze now. Johnson got the mare away, and went to a near-by ledge of rock and watched his home go up in smoke.

III

OUTLAWS have been made through the necessity of self-defense. Johnson believed Lane would send the sheriff and a posse to combing the hills for him. He knew Lane and the ways of the people. Lane would have to "frame" on Johnson to explain Blaney's wound. Johnson began to plan.

When the last flames were only flickers and the cozy house was embers, the burned-out owner heaved himself into action. He sat Polly on the limb of a madrona-tree, where she would be comfortably close to the bed of coals to keep her warm against the cold night wind of the altitude, and tethered her there with a scrap of wire.

He saddled and started down the trail. Though an hour had elapsed since the first alarm, he made haste slowly lest he run into the men, who might be traveling slowly with Blaney.

A half-mile or so down, Rosy shied and showed some signs of disturbance. Hearing no one, after breathless listening, Johnson ventured to dismount and strike a match where the mare was uneasily sniffing. He found match-stubs and blood. Evidently the trio had stopped to stanch Blaney's wounds.

Johnson rode on, cautious yet making good headway. To carry out his plan he must reach Blue Mountain long before daybreak. In fact he must be back in the mountains by daybreak—back in the jungle of stone and scrub-oak that he had his mind on, where he meant to hole up for the coming day or perhaps longer before making a dash for Mexico. Or on the other hand where he might have to play the real desperado and stand off a posse to the last shot.

But before all this he must obtain a rifle and ammunition, then must dispose of Lane, and finally ride and hide for liberty's sake.

Johnson was hard and bitter as he rode along. Since he had been mature enough to plan, to hope as a man hopes—since the war days in fact, when his longings crystallized toward decency and good citizenship and friendships—he had been hoping for something far different from this. But now—a hunted man, an outlaw in the matrix, driven to it by the wilfulness, the contrariness and hate of one man, who had hated his father, the elder Johnson, also!

As he drew near the little town lights were just appearing here and there in the houses. Since it was nowhere near morning Johnson understood that the call to arms to hunt him was going around by telephone. Half of the Blue Mountain men could be counted on to ride in the posse. Johnson advanced cautiously, for the men might be riding out at any moment.

The lobby of the hotel gave out a splotch of light. He guessed that would be the assemblying-point.

He tied Rosy in the shadow of a little electric plant where a chugging gasoline engine made current for the business places. This was in the middle of a vacant lot. There were more vacant spaces than filled ones.

He walked rapidly across a road and found the shadow of the high lath fence that enclosed the big yard of the hotel. This he followed to a point convenient for turning off to the rear yard and back doors of the big trading-company store.

Two men were standing beside horses before the hotel. A third man crossed the lighted lobby. Johnson stole nearer to hear what might be said. The third man spoke as the screen door slammed.

"How bad is Blaney shot? Good thing if he'd been killed."

"He wasn't hit so bad—through the shoulder—but he's lost most of his blood."

"What was him and Harkins doing up there in the night anyhow?"

Evidently this recruit had heard snatches of the story.

"Harkins," went on one of the men by the horses, "said they were riding across to bring back the vote from 'Dobe House Precinct in the morning. Hugo was on uneasy street about his nomination. He sent 'em."

"Uh-huh. Lane called Hark out from his house about dark. And Johnson jumped 'em—or what?"

"That's what Harkins says. They were

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riding past. Johnson called 'em to halt. And when they answered he just began to shoot, so Harkins says. Says Johnson shouted out something about ambushing every low-lifed cattleman that tried to go over the trail. Says Johnson swore he'd kill the first man that showed up in the mountains in pursuit of him. Blaney fell off his horse, but Harkins got him back on, and they floated down the trail pretty rapid."

"What about a fire? Somebody said they saw a light up in the mountains."

"Don't know. Harkins said it looked as if Johnson had set the brush afire to light up the trail or something."

"Huh!" snorted he who had come from the hotel. "Sounds fishy—specially with Hugo Lane mixed up in it."

"Hugo ain't a crook!"

"Ain't he? All right. He can crook all he wants to, seeing the victim is that grinning hyena. Get rid of Johnson; good riddance."

The other two laughed shortly. Another horseman approached.

Johnson backed out along the fence a way, and moved across the road, entering the so-called junk-yard of the store. There was lumber and litter of all sorts. Near a groaning, squeaking windmill he remembered having seen a pile of scrap iron—rods from mowing-machines, parts of two or three windmills, a corn-binder, the wreck of a car. He rediscovered the litter in the now moonless darkness by careful feeling, and picked out the sort of iron he had in mind. It was, by the feel, part of a spring from an automobile, or possibly an old horse carriage. It would answer anyhow for a jimmy.

The window of the company office, near by in the rear, next engaged him. On every occasion when he had stood within the office to pay his bills to the tall, gaunt bookkeeper, he had noted with mild wonder that the window was protected in its lower half by vertical iron rods that seemed to be loosely set into the two iron strips that ran crosswise. Now he tested this appearance, and the rods lifted out without the slightest difficulty.

So far so good. The thin end of the jimmy went under the window nicely. But the prying was a different thing. He tried it tentatively, and saw that he had the leverage to smash the window or break off the two old-fashioned cast-iron side rods —those little pull-out spring catches—that passed through the window-frame. But such a smash or wrench might make a great deal of noise.

The windmill, close overhead, made a great deal of noise at intervals by squeaking and groaning as the wind shifted its course slightly. Johnson tensed the pry under the window and waited for an outbreak of the tinny rattle and groan overhead.

Across the office he would find a door opening into the main body of the store. If this were locked he would be compelled to find a way to break it. If it were not locked—but not a chance in a hundred. The bookkeeper was too careful.

The groan of the windmill over the well came again with a shift of the breeze. Johnson pressed the bar. But not hard enough. The window held. He waited again, and tried again, and this time the catches gave and the window opened halfway with a rattle and bang.

The noise was wholly unlike the mechanical groan overhead. He held his breath to listen for running feet, alarmed voices. But these did not come, and after a moment he crawled through the opening.

The door into the store stood wide open! The one chance in a hundred, thought the new footpad. For a moment he was uneasy over the fact. More than once he had seen Davis lock it, even if leaving for only a brief time. Perversely his fingers itched all at once to reach to the electric switch by the gun-case and flash the light on for a second to sweep the store and see that nobody else was there.

He paused to listen. There was no sound throughout the store save for the squealing of mice in the flour department.

He tiptoed forward behind a counter, knowing exactly where to go. Into his mackinaw pockets he stuffed sweet chocolate bars, cans of sausages and plugs of tobacco. Then he crossed the store, feeling carefully, and arrived at his main objective, the big glass gun-case:

Thirty-thirty rifles and other pieces reposed there in all their newness. He had looked the case through more than once. Ammunition was convenient. He meant to take a thirty-thirty rifle and a belt of cartridges, and cartridges for his forty-four revolver:

One minute longer and he would be an

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outlaw sure enough, a store-breaker, a thief. He hesitated, poignant regret flowing through him. He wanted peace and a home and friends. But—he threw off the call and jerked his mind to the task in hand.

To his surprize he found the case locked, a small padlock holding hasp to staple. It was startling. The lock had never been there before. The lock in daily use was at the bottom. He had expected to jimmy the case. He fumbled, pondered, wished again for a flood of the store's light in one illuminating lightning flash.

And then obligingly the lights came on.

Deputy Sheriff Medhurst stood with his left hand raised to the switch and his right hand holding a revolver that pointed at Johnson.

Johnson slowly raised his arms before the amused stare of the officer.

"Hull gull handful, how many?" said Medhurst. "Guessed you right, didn't I, Johnson? Recollected you was out of shells."

"Med," said Johnson, "my parrot is at home tied on a limb with a piece of balin'-wire. Will you bring her to me in jail?"

"I'll see she don't starve," promised the deputy. "For her sake."

IV

JESS DAVIT COUNTY is precisely the size of the State of Delaware. Its population, including the Mexicans, was fewer than twelve hundred. So everybody knew Johnson, and had known his father.

The conviction of Johnson on Hugo Lane's charge of "shooting one Chester Blaney with intent to wound or kill, in a general scheme of contrary recklessness and revenge, with malice aforethought and premeditation," was a foregone conclusion before ever the prisoner went to trial.

Not probably that everybody believed the charge to be true. Many in fact mistrusted Hugo Lane. But as a cowhand expressed it, Johnson had at one time or another caterwauled at every man in the county; and the men of the county were human, and contrary, and could honestly see no good in the big, pirate-looking tobacco-chewer.

This human contrariness— But Judge Smith expressed something on the subject in ruling following an argument between counsel—Lane for the State and Cobbleton for the defense—just before Johnson took the witness-stand late in the day to testify for himself.

"Gentlemen," diverged the court philosophically, "the human mind is an amazing set of contradictions. It does not so much object to truth perhaps, but it can not bear to be crossed by another human will unless it has learned meekness. The prisoner, through a period of years, has resisted other human minds, has opposed them from almost every conceivable angle. These same human minds have snapped back at him. It is contrary minds clashing.

"It has struck me that these unfortunate things that bring this man before the bar of justice, might not have occurred had Johnson been willing to give in, to recede an inch, or if the citizens in general had 'backed down' in Christly meekness. Proceed."

Cobbleton, concerned in oil-well hopes, uninterested, preoccupied, probably preferring to see Johnson convicted, motioned for his client to take the stand. The court had appointed the lawyer. He was more concerned in getting out gracefully than in anything else.

Johnson, sullen, resentful, strode to the stand. Aunt Polly perched on his shoulder. He sat down with a flop that nearly threw the bird off. She screamed pettishly. She had not uttered a syllable in human fashion since the fire that burned her master's home. Johnson, face sagging with tobacco, leered his contemptuous mirth over the courtroom.

The judge eyed him without pleasure. Sheriff Meal, the only armed man in the room, regarded him with bitter eye. These expressions were duplicated in the jury and the audience. Johnson and his bird were friendless.

"Johnson," said the court, "couldn't you get rid of the bird and your tobacco while you are on the stand? It seems to me you would wish to make as favorable an appearance as possible. That tobacco—you look hideous."

Johnson, who was on a level with the judge because of the height of the witness chair, turned and looked at the court with a speculative eye, and began to make those motions with his mouth that forecast a Big Bertha discharge. The court appeared

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to become thirsty all at once. He slid from the bench and hastily went to the corner of the room to a stationary hand-basin and drew a drink of water in a glass. His Adam's apple ran the scale, and as he set the glass down he said:

"Oh, on second thought, Johnson, I reckon it would not be right to deprive you of your feathered friend and the solace of the weed. You may retain your cud. Proceed."

Johnson turned his muzzle and shot along the front line of the jury into a spittoon fifteen feet away.

Cobbleton opened with the formal preliminary questions and proceeded by instructing the prisoner to tell his story. Then he stood back paring his nails with a penknife and allowed Johnson to talk. Johnson told his story in the manner of a good sergeant reporting a serious matter to his captain—concisely, without human appeal.

Only once was he interrupted. That was when in telling of Harkins and Lane talking on the trail he stated that Lane said he would send Johnson to the penitentiary for shooting Blaney. Lane sprang up, a thin-lipped cackle rising high, and derisively asked the court if he, Lane, should file an information of conspiracy against himself.

"The prisoner," answered the court dryly, "has the right to his defense."

When Johnson finished, Cobbleton seemed at a loss how to proceed. Apparently he had lost the thread of the discourse in his preoccupation. To fill in he picked up Johnson's revolver, which had been introduced as Exhibit A and laid on the clerk's desk, and said—

"Take this."

He reached it out.

"Can you identify that?" he asked.

Johnson looked at the gun. He gripped the butt in friendly fashion. The tips of his left fingers stroked the barrel with a sort of tenderness, and he looked over the crowd as if wishing the thing were loaded. He frowned at Lane. The audience was breathless.

Johnson "broke" the gun and exposed the cylinder—six gaping holes. Empty.

He clicked the gun shut and was about to speak when Cobbleton interrupted.

"Wait. You need not answer."

The attorney may have thought that after all he should not have his client identify the gun. Or it may have occurred to him that he was doing something detrimental to his legal reputation. Whatever it was, he took the gun and returned it to the clerk, who dropped it into a drawer of his desk.

"Oh-ho!" smirked Hugo Lane in the manner of an attorney trying to impress the court-room with his sagacity. "Now we wonder why you did that, Cobby. In the cross-examination we shall hand that revolver to our friend and let him have his say."

Cobbleton shrugged.

"You may cross now," he said.

Before the prosecutor could begin the judge spoke up and said that adjournment time was at hand.

"Yes, it is a bit early," he admitted to an unspoken protest.

"But this is the night of the regular court week dance, and already I see some young bucks back there eager to move out these seats and desks and wax the floor."

The adjournment, however, was no real interruption, for at the opening of court next morning Hugo Lane announced that he would proceed with the cross-examination of the prisoner.

Johnson entered the courtroom ahead of Deputy Sheriff Medhurst. His entrance brought a gasp, for dangling from his ears was a great pair of brassy-looking earrings, which, with the parrot and his black hair and gaunt, satirical face, gave him the air and look of an old-fashioned pirate more than ever.

"Great sunrise!" ejaculated Judge Smith. "Why are you wearing those things?"

"I got 'em in Gibraltar," said Johnson.

"I did not ask where you obtained them. I asked why you are wearing them."

"Oh."

"Why?" thundered the court.

Sheriff Meal, who like Deputy Sheriff Medhurst, had a heavy revolver in a scabbard at his side, sat in a fat man's easy chair and glared at Johnson. Lane glared at Johnson. His own attorney glared. The audience showed no gleam of mirth. Johnson climbed into the witness chair with a show of insolence—that is, he grinned impudently at the bleak reception and shook his head so that the earrings glinted and jingled.

"Well?" reminded the court.

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"I'll tell you," Johnson conceded cheerily with an air of friendly confidence—seeing that this sort of conduct was irritating to everybody. "Five, six years now, your honor, if I say, 'Howdy' to these people I'd ought of said, 'Good morning.' If I say, 'Good morning' I'd ought of said, 'Good-by.' If I ask for *frijoles* at the store I'd ought to have said brown beans. If I request silver at the bank he'll shove out a bill and say, 'Take it or do without.' Contrary, all of 'em!

"So you see, judge, I thought I'd do something different and ladylike this morning and win the admiration of all, including yourself."

He chuckled his slow, "Huh-huh-huh!" that was a red rag to these people, and he turned his defiant leer upon them, and he shook his head to make the rings jingle.

From the judge to Meal and Medhurst, and from them to the latest spectator at the back of the room there was not a glint of amusement, not a flicker of friendliness. Johnson had donned the earrings just to irritate these people, to flaunt his defiance. He had not thought of it as a test of their unfriendliness toward him. But he saw how effective a test it was. In a way he was hoist by his own petard. For it cut him, this emphatic lesson of how alone he stood—cut into the old wound made by the old man's words in the crowd that day.

Hugo Lane, watching the crowd for its attitude toward Johnson, understood the animosity and took advantage of it.

"Johnson," said he, "you haven't a friend in the world."

Caught up in his thoughts by this man who had been his father's enemy and who had now begun to hound him, Johnson himself saw red. He half-slid from his chair as if to spring upon the lawyer. Lane got lazily to his feet.

"Be careful!" he warned.

He went closer, and, shaking a finger accusingly, said loudly—

"If you had a gun or a knife in your hands now you would try to slay me, wouldn't you, Johnson?"

Johnson's glance skipped over to where his gun lay on the clerk's desk. The act, and his grimness, was sufficient answer.

Lane laughed out; and, facing the men and women, he said something in his own behalf:

"You saw that! You may judge for yourself the value of his testimony that I had a hand in a conspiracy against him."

"Proceed," said the court. "Pro-ceed."

"Johnson," Lane started in, taking up the revolver, Exhibit A, "your attorney paused awkwardly over your identifying this gun last evening. We shall renew our pleasantries of the day by permitting you to identify the piece. Will you take this and tell me if it is yours? And don't strike me with it," he added.

Johnson took the gun. For an instant he did contemplate striking out with it, but the attorney cautiously drew back.

"Go ahead," admonished Cobbleton impatiently. "You can't escape cross-examination."

Johnson looked at the gun. He gripped it lovingly. Times when he had made bull's-eyes flashed through his mind, and the last time he had fired, that night at Blaney, at the Blaney sitting down in front now, white of face and with a shoulder bandage.

The tips of Johnson's fingers stroked the bright barrel with a sort of tenderness. Gently he broke the gun. The cylinder was exposed.

And six big bright cartridges filled the six holes. Loaded!

All the people saw, or sensed, the fact.

No person moved. Johnson snapped the gun shut. His slitted eyes leaped to the only armed men in the room. Sheriff Meal was caught with his hands clasped across his stomach. Medhurst was taken unawares with his hands gripped over one knee.

But, oddly enough, a thought other than of shooting was in Johnson's mind. His lips formed the word, but no sound came—

"A friend!"

His gaze searched the silent crowd. No man gave a sign. Any one down there, almost, might have loaded the gun overnight. It did not occur to Johnson that an enemy of Lane, rather than a friend of himself, might have put the shells in the revolver.

Johnson got to his feet. With his left hand he unclasped the earrings and dropped them into a pocket. He stepped down from the witness chair. As his feet touched the floor Blaney popped up and sang out:

"Don't shoot! I'll confess. Me, Harkins, Lane— Conspiracy— Burn you out— Kerosene——"

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In the middle of the room Harkins jumped up like a toy on a spring.

"Me, too!" he shouted.

Johnson stepped forward, intent on his thoughts. He laid the gun on the clerk's desk and went around the desk to the corner wash-basin, and there he drew a glass of water and rinsed his mouth, his back to the audience.

He faced the people presently. A change had taken place, in his face and in his thinking. The sag had lifted somewhat, the smirk was gone. Everybody sat staring.

"Folks," said Johnson, "I've been chewing tobacco mostly to make my face look or'nary to mock you. I've quit."

He went up to the fringe of the audience. His attitude was that of a man wishing to be friendly. His face was lighted up.

"Somebody was friendly!" he said with subdued jubilance. "Folks, I'm—I'm aimin' to mend my ways."

"Looks to me as if somebody was giving in an inch," observed the judge. "Proceed!"

They "proceeded." A dozen men over the audience got to their feet and came forward, looks of friendliness on their countenances. And in the lead was the ranchman who had had Johnson arrested and made the case that caused him to be sentenced to three months in jail. He stuck out his hand. So did Johnson. Their palms met with a little smack.

"Good shot!" shrilled Polly, her voice back.

OH, ISABEL! *A Complete Novelette*

by NORMAN SPRINGER

Author of "The Ghost of Dago Fiddler," "Freedom's Last Stand," etc.

YOU can put it down in a general way o' speakin' that I ain't got nothing against dogs and women as such. It's when they ain't dogs but babies, when they ain't women but men, that I don't like them. Discussin' them full and by, as the sayin' is, why, women and dogs is a lot alike. They're all right in their place, and that place is ashore.

Yes, sir, ever since the time, before the war, when I sailed before the mast in the *Henry P. Jenkins*, I always want to know two things before I join a ship. The first is—

"Is the Old Man's wife making the voyage?"

And the second is—

"Is there a dog aboard, and what kind o' dog is he?"

This *Henry P. Jenkins* belonged to San Francisco, the old firm o' Jenkins & Tait. She was one o' these roomy old wood barks like you don't see many of nowadays, the kind they used to build by the mile and saw off as required. Comfortable, that describes her; easy to handle and sort o' homy-like. Why, she was the homiest old windbag I ever met up with. That's why I put my "Bob Smith" on her articles. She had a reputation for bein' a happy ship.

She was a family ship. We says to each

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other for'ard that that was what we liked about the old hooker. Our Old Man was Captain Elmer Tunnicliffe, and he was married to his job for a solid fact. His wife was the widder o' Henry P. Jenkins, and part owner o' the line; she was the Jenkins in Jenkins & Tait. We says to each other, what a lead pipe cinch our Old Man has got, and we wished we was in his boots. Oh, my eye! Them was the days before we met the family.

Captain Tunnicliffe was a nice old feller and not near as fussy as you'd think from his looks. He had good habits at sea, and that's rare in skippers. He believed in lettin' well enough alone; that was a favorite sayin' o' his, and he lived up to it. Once he took a departure he figured his work was done until landfall was due. He took a walk on the poop every mornin', and his noon sights, and the rest o' the day he sat in the cabin reading the *Family Herald* and sippin' of his toddy.

Captain Tunnicliffe was a great hand for his toddy. In fact, he fair swum in it. He made it out o' canned milk and rum, and it was a prime swig. The best o' it was that he wasn't a stingy Old Man. Every time it was all hands, and every Saturday night regular, there was a tot o' rum around, because, says Captain Tunnicliffe, he's a gent o' the old school and believed in livin' up to it. We all thought very kindly o' Captain Tunnicliffe.

Him bein' that way most o' the time it was up to the mate to run the ship, and he did. I'll say right here that Mr. Heath was a prime sailorman. But he was a bit too hasty in his manner o' speakin' to a hand, and too fond altogether o' dishin' out jobs. We didn't think so kindly o' Mr. Heath as we did of the skipper. But we can't have everything, we says to each other, and a ship needs a mate, and what has to be, is, and thinkin' that way about it we got along pretty good with Mr. Heath.

We got along pretty good with Mr. Hansen, the second mate, too. He didn't amount to much, bein' a squarehead, and he done just what Mr. Heath told him to do. It was said o' him that he washed Winter and Summer, regular, once each time; but maybe that was just talk, because he was so hairy all over he was bound to look dark-complected.

Well, we had a fine passage o' seventy-nine days out to Sydney, with lumber cargo. When we made port, we was all that pleased with the ship there wasn't a single hand run away. No, sir; we says we'd stick by her and see her home again. So we went up to Newcastle, which is above Sydney, and loaded coal for San Francisco.

And there we was on a sunny day, as the books say, loaded deep and all ready to leave the dock for sea. We was just waitin' for the skipper, who had been livin' ashore and going down to Sydney pretty regular.

"He's a giddy old bird," we used to say in the foc'sle; and, "What if his wife knew?"

Oh, my eye, we never guessed!

Well, I had been workin' aft, and was just going for'ard, when the mate hailed me.

"Come back here, you big bum, and coil down this gear right!" says he.

So that's how it happened I was handy to the gangway when Captain Tunnicliffe come aboard.

"Mr. Heath, are the stores all aboard?" says he, kind o' excited-like.

"All aboard, and all stowed," says the mate. "I put them extra cases o' canned milk in your room, sir, as usual. The crew's aboard drunk and sober, lines singled, and we're all set to cast off. Unless I'm mistaken, sir, that's the tug whistlin' there across the river."

"Ah, excellent," says the Old Man. "You're a very sufficient officer, Mr. Heath, and I've always said it's a pleasure to sail with you. Yes, sir, I've said that frequent."

"Thanks, captain," says Mr. Heath, lookin' suspicious all of a sudden.

"Now, did a—er—a trunk or so come aboard this mornin'?" asks the captain.

They was right before his nose, piled on the main deck, and the mate pointed to them.

"Five trunks, and a dicky bird in a cage—see 'em," says he. "What I want to know, sir, is what's them? You ain't shipped a passenger, have you?"

The captain was so nervous he was walkin' on eggs, so to speak.

"Oh, no—that is, not exactly a passenger," says he. "Of course, not a passenger; I ain't no mail-boat. It's this way, mister. Now, what is it us poor fellers miss when we're at sea?"

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"Trouble," says the mate.

"We miss home comforts," says the skipper. "What makes home comforts? Woman, lovely woman, God bless her. It's the woman's touch we miss, Mr. Heath."

"Great Scott!" says the mate, only what he said was stronger.

"I got a great surprize for you," the skipper went on, not noticin'. "Violet—Mrs. Tunnicliffe—who you often heard me talk about—now, where do you think she is this minute, Mr. Heath?"

"In San Francisco, I hope," says Mr. Heath, lookin' more and more worried.

"Wrong. She's right here in Australia," says the captain. "I've been visiting with her in Sydney this time I've been away. Thought I'd keep it secret—surprize, you know. She come out by mail-boat, and she has consented to make the passage home with us. In fact, that's what she come out for. You know what women are, Mr. Heath—lovin' hearts, can't bear the separation, all that thing. Just think—ain't it fine, mister? We'll have my wife lookin' after us, makin' us comfortable. Them trunks is hers, and they go into the cabin."

"I quit," says Mr. Heath.

"Oh, but you can't," says the skipper. "Why, man, we're all ready for sea, and the tug will be alongside in a jiffy."

"Yes, I can," argues Mr. Heath. "It's a matter o' principle," says he. "Women is bad luck in a ship."

"Oh, come now, mister," says the skipper, pretty near cryin' it looked like.

He'd be in a pretty pickle if his mate up and went on strike, and he knew it.

"My Violet ain't like other women," says he. "Why, she's as salty as you yourself, bein' the widder o' one seaman and wife to another, and part owner to boot."

"That's why," says Mr. Heath.

"Now, mister, ain't I always treated you fair and square, and just like a friend and father?" Captain Tunnicliffe cries. "What sort of friendship do you call it, leavin' me in the lurch at a time like this?"

That got Mr. Heath—the words and the Old Man's implorin' manner.

"Well, if you put it that way, I'll stay," he says.

He took a squint across the river at the tug.

"Maybe we can get away before she shows up," he says.

"No time," the captain told him, shakin' his head and heavin' out a sigh. "She's comin' down the dock now. I run ahead to break the news gentle-like."

I took a squint over the rail, and there was a lady just steppin' on to the gangway.

"What a whale of a gal," I says—to myself, y' understand.

A regular three hundred-pounder she was, tall as a drum major, and broad o' beam as a battleship. Aye, and she had a man-o'-war air about her.

She spotted the captain and the mate before either o' them spotted her. She sent a hail ahead, and I swear it froze all hands to the spot. Oh, she had a noble voice, had the Lady Violet; yes, sir, it beat any bo'sun's beller I ever heard. There wasn't a man on the ship that didn't know from that voice that here was the boss o' the works comin' aboard. It sounded just like that.

"Elmer! Come and get Isabel!"

It wasn't what she said, it was how she said it.

"Elmer, take Isabel!"

It was just like she had jabbed him with a hot poker, the way Captain Tunnicliffe jumped and hustled.

"Yes, my love; comin', my dear," and the Old Man went and took Isabel.

She had Isabel under her coat, and when she hauled it out I seen that Isabel was a dog. She kissed Isabel, but she didn't offer to kiss the Old Man. Isabel did that.

"Now be careful," she says. "Elmer, don't you squeeze the darlin'. Carry her in both arms, you fool!"

That's the way Isabel came aboard, washin' the skipper's face, and him lookin' like he'd do something about it if he dared. He dropped the pup as soon as he was over the rail, and swabbed his cheek with his sleeve, and give a hand to the Mrs.

"My dear, this is Mr. Heath, my mate," he says, as soon as she was down on the deck. "He was just tellin' me how glad he was. He's just that tickled; why, he was just sayin' to me, 'It's the woman's touch we miss at sea,' and then when I told him you was comin' he was so happy the tears came into his eyes. Didn't they, mister?"

"Of course," says Mr. Heath, a bit dazed-like.

"Hump! You look it!" says the old girl.

She took a squint along the decks.

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"Your ship is filthy," she says. "I'm surprized, Elmer; poor Henry would turn over in his grave if he seen this mess. Why ain't my things inside? Where's Isabel?" And she looked at me.

Well, I knew where Isabel was just then. Isabel was where I was, interruptin' my work and makin' a nuisance of herself. Why, just as soon as the skipper put her down she made a bee-line for me and tried to make lunch off o' my leg, and I never done anything to her either except spit at her to make her go away. But that's the sort o' pup Isabel was, lickin' or snappin', either swabbin' you with her tongue or biting a chunk out o' your leg. One o' these shakin', shiverin', long-haired pests with pop eyes and a wet nose, and the temper o' the devil himself—that was Isabel.

I had to defend myself, hadn't I? It wasn't on any articles I signed that I was to be dog-meat. And spittin' at her didn't do no good either; it only made her madder. So when she come at me I stuck out my foot.

No, I didn't kick her. I wouldn't kick no lady's dog. I just stuck out my foot, and Isabel run against it; and then she turned around and scooted for home, ki-yipin' like she was murdered. That dog had the beller o' a bloodhound.

Talk about a squall out o' a clear sky! Oh, my eye! You'd have thought from the row it was shipwreck at least.

"Oh, Isabel! Great Heavens—me precious, me darlin'!" shouts the old girl, scoopin' up the pup, who started to ki-yip louder than ever.

"Oh, my dear, what is it, what is it?" says Captain Tunnicliffe, who hadn't seen me defendin' myself and didn't know what it was all about.

"Oh, ——!" says the mate, lookin' hard at me.

"Clear out o' this, Smitty, while the clearin' is good," says I to myself, and I started to edge away for'ard.

I didn't have a chance to make a get-away, not a chance. That woman had the speed o' a sub-chaser when she wanted to show it, and she bore down on me like this avengin' fury I've read about. Yes, sir, and what with her talkin', and Isabel growlin' and showing her teeth, and me backed up against the rail—well, I felt like that picture o' Dave and Goliar that was hangin' on the Sunday-school wall when I was a kid, and me the little feller in it.

So I reached a hand behind me and grabbed hold of a belayin'-pin. I wasn't goin' to bust the lady, y'understand; but if she set that dog on me I made up my mind there'd be a cold Isabel layin' around there.

"You great big hulkin' brute, what d'ye mean, kickin' Isabel in the face!" says the old girl, towerin' above me, and all her chins and everything just shakin', she was so mad. "I'll have you arrested," she says. "I'll have you attended to. I'll attend to you myself. Oh, you big beast—you—you— Well," she says, "what are you grinnin' at? What d'ye mean by it? Why don't you say something?"

"Please ma'am—" I says.

"Shut up!" says she. "Don't you dare talk back to me! Oh, you— Elmer, why don't you do something, why don't you say something? He talked back to me, he kicked Isabel in the face, he— Oh, Isabel! Look, Elmer, the nasty thing—Isabel's face is all tobacker. Where's the steward? Steward! Steward!"

"Yes, yes, my dear, but don't get excited; don't carry on," says Captain Tunnicliffe, dancin' round the old girl like he had springs in his feet. "Your nerves, my dear; you'll be a wreck. Yes, yes, I'll speak to the man."

And then he sings out to me:

"Yes, y'swab, what d'ye mean—kickin' my wife in the face, and talkin' back to Isabel! I'll keelhaul you, s'help me, if you do it again! I'll learn you manners with a handspike if you don't watch out!"

"Elmer, don't stand there jawin'," says the Lady Violet. "Send that man away," she says, "and get the steward quick. You ain't got good sense; don't you see Isabel wants a bath? Give me your handkerchief; I want to wipe her face. Oh, you fool, now what are you doin'?"

She says this last because the Old Man was so rattled he didn't know himself what he was doin'. He pulled out his handkerchief and threw it at me, and then he says to Mr. Heath, very fierce, "Now get along for'ard, y'swab, before I dust you off proper!" and then he seen his mistake and started to say he didn't mean him but me, and the Lady Violet started again, and Isabel began to yip-yip, and just then the

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tugboat captain stuck his head above the rail, and he wanted to know was we deaf or what, and we'd better look alive if we wanted to use this tide.

Well, I made a getaway then, seein' that the goin' was good. Captain Tunnicliffe, he was glad to change the subject by swearin' back at the tugboat skipper; and Mr. Heath, he was glad to relieve himself by swearin' at the hands; and by the time we shoved our line aboard the tug the Lady Violet had got hold o' the steward and was jawin' him for not comin' quicker, and tellin' him not to mind the crew's dinner, but bear a hand with Isabel's bath. And that's the way we went to sea.

NOW that was a sad day for the happy crew o' the *Henry P. Jenkins*, only we didn't find it out right off the bat because Lady Violet was busy washin' up Isabel and getting settled, and we was busy getting to sea and snugging down. But next day we found out what it meant to have the skipper's wife aboard.

Oh, my blinkin' eye! We found out just who was wearin' the pants that voyage—in a manner o' speakin', y'understand. It wasn't only the mate who felt like quittin' then; it was all hands. But we couldn't quit unless we wanted to swim for it.

Well, I guess the first feller on board to find out how times was changed was the cat, a fine old tom name o' Neptune, who had sailed more voyages in the *Henry P. Jenkins* than the skipper himself. He had always been one o' the afterguard, Nep had; he slept on the rope mat before the door to the skipper's room, and policed the pantry, and sort o' bossed things generally in that part o' the ship.

Us fellers in the starboard watch were settin' up the wash-deck gear, just after coffee-time in the four to eight, when we heard Nep's voice, and we heard Isabel's voice, and after a minute it sounded like Nep was havin' the best of it. And then we heard the old girl's voice, and the old man's voice, and it sounded like things was bein' thrown about in there.

Pretty soon Nep hopped out on deck, and he was a mad cat if I ever seen one. Why his tail was swelled up till it looked like a belayin'-pin. He sat down on the booby hatch and swore somethin' scandalous; but Isabel didn't come out, and after a bit Nep wandered away for'ard. He lived in the fo'csle after that, and took his meals in the galley.

Kicked out; yes, sir, that's it. Turned out o' his home, and all on account o' that Isabel.

Well then, pretty soon the cabin boy, who was a kid with more pimples to the square inch than any kid I ever seen, name o' Raymond, came out on deck, and Lady Violet's voice came out after him, and she says if he wasn't careful and didn't do what she told him she'd warm his hide for him. Raymond had a piece o' string in his hand, and Isabel was tied to that string.

Raymond's job was to lead Isabel around for her morning exercise. My eye! Even Mr. Heath couldn't have talked any rougher than Raymond did when he got far enough for'ard so the old girl couldn't hear what he was sayin'.

Next along come the steward, and what Raymond couldn't think o' sayin', he could. And you couldn't blame that feller for talkin' that way, even if it was about a lady, because he wasn't steward really but just cook, that old hooker not ratin' a proper steward; and now that Raymond was nurse-girlin' the pup, he had to get breakfast for both ends o' the ship and lay the table aft, all by himself and before seven bells went.

Oh, he was wild! He says the meanest things he could think of just as loud as he dared, and they wasn't all about the Lady Violet, either. He talked about her most, but he was mad at Captain Tunnicliffe, too, for allowing such things.

The captain was just a blushin' jellyfish, he says, and we thought that was kind of hard on the old boy, because after all he was just a lightweight, and she wasn't no fair match for him even if he did forget he was a gent o' the old school and lam her with a handspike. That's what the steward wanted him to do.

"You got to treat 'em rough," he says, "or there ain't no livin' with them. Don't I know?" he says. "Me that's had two in my time; and I didn't allow no slobberin' dog come into my bed, you bet! Why, if things was like they ought to be, that woman would be helpin' me get this here meal ready, or else she'd be danglin' a baby on her knee, or doin' the wash, or something else that was meek and quiet, like a lady should be doin', instead o'

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throwin' fits about a dog and puttin' on the airs of an admiral o' line. Why," says he "that woman has gone and spoiled this here voyage already."

We was all afraid she had gone and done that. But we didn't want to believe it.

"Go on!" says we. "Why, the Old Man wouldn't stand for that."

"The Old Man would stand for anything," says the steward, very disgusted. "Why, he'd stand on his bloomin' head if she says the word. I tell you she done it not half an hour ago. Why, she was on the warpath before she was out o' bed this mornin', and she's ragin' around the cabin this very minute in her kimono, and if you want to know what I think about that, why, no lady would act so.

"She ain't no lady; she's a bloomin' bucko, that's what. Didn't she call me a clumsy old fool, and right to my very face, and all because I got some soap in that —— pup's eyes! And she heaved all the canned milk out o' his room and made me store it in the pantry; and then she collared him, right before me and Mr. Hansen, and took away his keys, and now nobody but her can even look at the stuff. This ship has gone as dry as Kansas is supposed to be, and that's a fact."

Mr. Hansen come for'ard and told the carpenter the same yarn, so we knew the steward wasn't lying. There wouldn't be no calls to lay aft with your pannikin this voyage. Well, we was a pretty glum bunch. If you want to know the truth, why, most o' the shellbacks in the old barky was there just because Captain Tunnicliffe was a gent o' the old school. And now—well, now was when the cussin' and the hard feelin's really broke out in the *Henry P. Jenkins*.

It wasn't just that the ship went teetotal. That was only the first straw, so to speak. And that woman went on pilin' up the straws, and if we had a camel aboard, why, his back would have been busted the first week out. Bein' nothing but sailors, we had to stand it.

When it came to running the ship the Lady Violet was skipper and mates both. She bossed the whole works, and that's a fact.

When that breakfast what the steward was beefin' so much about was set out before her, she went right up in the air and come down on the poor feller with both feet and flattened him out, in a manner o' speakin'. Then she took a jab at Mr. Heath and a swing at Mr. Hansen, and she slapped Raymond to make him mind quicker, and she told the skipper to shut up when he hadn't said a blessed word, and then she come back to the steward and just dressed him down proper. Yes, sir, and she done it all at the top o' her voice, so that the man at the wheel heard every word she says.

She says that meal was a shame and disgrace, and so was the man who spoiled it. Well, he was a rotten cook, and very careless about burnin' the burgoo and lettin' cockroaches and things climb into the soup; but to be bawled out that way by a woman wasn't very nice, and when we heard about it we all says no lady would have done it.

And then she told Mr. Heath if he wanted to eat with her he'd have to throw his stinkin' old pipe away because it fair gagged her and she couldn't talk. And then she sang out to Mr. Hansen that some people on this ship needs a tow, and was he afraid o' cuttin' his throat that he never used his razor? And then she told Raymond she was goin' to skin him alive if he didn't keep a clean tablecloth and wash them forks better than that.

She says Isabel is her precious ookums, and does precious ookums want to eat breakfast with mamma? She says to the Old Man, who hadn't opened his trap:

"Shut up, and stop that glarin'. Isabel has better table manners than any o' you toughs, and she'll sit here if I say so."

That was breakfast, and after breakfast she heaved herself out on the main deck and follered the steward for'ard. She wanted to see the place that mess come from, she says; and oh, my eye, didn't she throw a fit! She made such a racket that Nep scooted up the fore rigging, and was marooned there yowlin' until a feller went up and got him.

She says the galley was a pig-sty, and steward was a pig, and that was all true enough. And she says—

"Get busy, my man, and clean up this place, if you know what's good for you!"

And then she threw the socks he was dryin' over the stove into the lee scuppers, and the bucket containin' his last month's wash out on the weather deck, and while he was cleanin' the galley, she says, he

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might as well clean himself, because if he didn't, why, she'd be tempted to take a holystone to him with her own hands.

Well, we sort o' enjoyed hearing her rag the steward, because, as I said, he was a pretty rotten cook. Some one in the crowd raised a cheer when she spoke o' holystone.

But we didn't cheer long and loud. No, sir. She took a slant at us, all standin' around for'ard watching the show, and then she pointed to the fore rigging, where the fo'csle wash was hanging, and she says:

"Take them rags down, and keep them down. I won't have my ship lookin' like a second-hand shop!"

That took the laugh out o' us, you bet. If we wasn't to dry our wash in the fore rigging, where was we to dry it? Why, the fore rigging is the place for the fo'csle wash! But we took it down, and we began to ask each other what would she do next. "*My ship*," she says, and we saw now that she was goin' to make all hands skip rope.

Well, she was too busy to actually tackle the fo'csle that day, because her time was all taken up between Isabel and the steward and renovatin' the cabin. Yes, sir, she renovated the cabin at the top o' her voice, and made it a fit place to live in. She went through the place like a gale o' wind, towin' Raymond after her and makin' him clean out all the holes that was too little for her to get into.

Captain Tunnicliffe—well, she run him out on deck and told him to take care o' Isabel, and he done so, wanderin' around the poop looking lost and miserable and draggin' the pup after him. We all felt sorry for Captain Tunnicliffe, because a feller could see with half an eye how much he was missin' his medicine.

We all felt sorry for ourselves, too, because Mr. Heath was breakin' in a new pipe, and it made him savage. He worked us up somethin' fierce, and that wasn't fair, because we wasn't to blame. But that's the way with a mate, and I never seen one different; take it out on the hands, that's what a mate does.

Mr. Hansen come up on deck like a ragin' bucko, too, and that was somethin' new for him. I swear there wasn't a feller knew that second greaser until he opened his mouth. Why, he'd gone and shaved off his whiskers; and that wasn't all, for Raymond told us how he'd sneaked a bucket o' water and a cake o' soap into Mr. Hansen's room, and Mr. Hansen had come out lookin' uncommon pale. The Lady Violet took one slant at him and says—

"Hump, it's about time!"

So he took it out on his watch.

That was just one day. Next day and the days that came after was much worse. I ain't goin' to take up your time by givin' a lot o' details about what that woman done, but what she done was plenty. Why, if some feller what had known the ship in the old days was to have come along he wouldn't have believed his eyes, she was so changed.

There was the steward. Now that feller put on a clean shirt every Saturday, that whole passage; and I never seen a cleaner galley, not even in a man-o'-war. That was a change o' heart for you!

There was the skipper. That poor man just got whiter and thinner and more meek and miserable every day. He couldn't sit and read the *Family Herald* no more, because the Lady Violet says she don't want no loafers in her house, and he needed the air and exercise anyway. Master! Why, he was past-master o' that ship, that's all he was. She laid out the work just like the skipper was supposed to but never did; every night she says to the mate—

"Now, mister, tomorrow I want you to do this and that."

You can just imagine how that made Mr. Heath and Mr. Hansen feel, and how they made us feel.

She landed on us fellers too. Oh, my eye, that woman didn't have no reserve, not a bit! She'd have inspection just like we was a navy, and every mornin' at two bells she'd be snoopin' around to see who she could make unhappy. Why, she'd walk right into the fo'csle with never a "by your leave," and that ain't no kind o' manners. Even a bucko mate wouldn't do that.

She says right out to our face that we was a lot o' scallywags, and we would keep this den white or she'd know why; and then she yanked Frank Green out o' his bunk, and set him to scrubbin' the floor. It was in his watch below, and it wasn't his peggy anyway; but that didn't make no difference to Lady Violet.

She didn't believe in sea customs. She says they was bosh. Them's her very words. She says to the captain, right

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before all hands, that he was a granny, and for him to mind his business and see Isabel didn't get into bad company and she'd run the ship for him. And then she says to the mate that when she says do a thing, why she wants him to do it right off the bat. Customs is bosh, says she, and the time to do a thing is now.

Strike me stiff if she didn't have us down on our knees prayin' for a white deck, and before we was two weeks out! It's a fact. The whole hog. Holystones, soojemooje, sand-and-canvas for the corners. And her sittin' up there on the poop huggin' that Isabel and watchin' us suffer. My eye, our language fair shocked that deck white.

It wasn't what we was doin' so much as why we was doin' it that made us mad. She didn't make no bones about it; she says right out before all hands that she wasn't cleanin' up the ship for our sakes, because we wasn't worth a decent body's second thought, the whole boilin' o' us. But she wasn't goin' to have her Isabel smirched up by no dirty deck, or made sick by bitin' dirty sailors, or upset by messes out o' a dirty galley.

She was doin' it for Isabel, mamma's little ookums, that —— pup. She was runnin' that ship to suit Isabel. That was all we was alive for, just to make life easy for Isabel. Oh, my eye! Twenty white men sufferin' and slavin' for a shiverin', snappin', goggle-eyed pup! Scrub, you beggars, scrub; and don't you dare look up!

THE passage out hadn't seemed a bit slow, us bein' so happy and contented. But, oh, Lord, the passage home! Why it seemed it never would come to no end.

When we was seventy-five days out we was standing in for the California coast, and we was a clean ship and a heart-broke crew. We says to each other, "This blinkin' voyage will never end," says we. But it did. In a blaze o' glory, so to speak.

It was Isabel's fault. All the hard luck in that ship was her fault. She was a Jonah if I ever seen one.

Some dogs has sense. Not Isabel. Not a speck. She had the whole poop to play on, and she'd come snarlin' and sniffin' for'ard every chance she got.

Maybe the steward would wave a chunk o' salt beef at her and say, "Nice Issy; come, Issy!" and that fool dog would come runnin' right up to the galley door. Nep would be hidin' inside, and out he'd hop. Then wouldn't the fur fly. My eye!

I'll say this for Isabel; she never failed to mix it. But that tomcat could lick a dozen like her. It wouldn't last but a minute, and then Isabel would have a bellyful, and she'd start aft yippin' and howlin'. Howlin'! When that pup started to cry you'd have thought she was a whole pack o' mastiffs, and you could have heard her for miles.

Now Nep had sense. He never followed her aft. He never went past the main hatch, and we'd pick him up quick and hide him down in the forepeak or somewhere, and when the Lady Violet come ragin' for'ard to slaughter him, why, we didn't know where he was or anything about it.

Isabel, she'd howl and howl, and the old girl would put medicine on her scratches and talk somethin' scandalous at the Old Man because maybe he went to sleep and let the pup out o' his sight. But it never taught Isabel anything; first chance she'd come for'ard for another lickin'.

One Sunday mornin' we had the main hatch open to air the cargo. Now you know what a cargo o' coal is like. It's subject to this spotty combustion you hear about. If it ain't got air it gets gas, and then it starts burnin' here and there in spots.

By rights the hatches ought to be off all the time in fair weather, and maybe the watch down in the hold diggin' holes to let more air in. But Lady Violet wouldn't have such a thing. It was bosh, says she; and it would muss up the deck; and Isabel might fall in and get hurt. This mornin' she was busy, and the mate opened the hatch.

Well, along about four bells Mr. Heath was leanin' over the taffrail, gazin' astern, and the skipper was snoozin' in his chair on the poop, and the old girl was washin' her hair in the cabin, so Raymond seen his chance and took it. Raymond had a dead rat tied to a piece o' spun yarn, and he dangled this rat, and Isabel come down off the poop to smell it closer. And she followed him for'ard.

Yes, sir, that dog didn't have no memory at all. She followed Raymond right past the fo'csle door and around the for'ard end o' the house where we was all hands loafin' on the fore hatch, and they couldn't see us from aft at all.

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Nep done himself proud. Seemed like he knew we was bearin' up for port, and this was the best chance he was ever likely to have to get even. Then Isabel bit his tail, and that made him extra mad. So he swiped her this way and he swiped her that way, and then he raked her fore and aft.

Isabel was howlin' by this time, and willin' to call it quits. Nep wouldn't have it so. Isabel would have made two o' him, and she was so hairy all over he couldn't hurt her serious; but he could make her darned uncomfortable, and he did. He licked her standin' up and layin' down and rollin' over, and then, when she finally did get a clear deck aft and scooted for home, why, what does Nep do but hop on her back and ride her!

It's a fact, my oath on it. He didn't ride her too far aft, either. That cat never lost his head for a minute. He knew he was safe if he stayed for'ard o' the main hatch. I didn't see it myself, but Joe Thomas, afterwards he swore he seen Nep usin' his hind legs to steer Isabel, and he must have done so because Isabel run—smash!—full tilt into the hatch coaming.

That's when Nep got safe ashore, in a manner o' speakin'. He scooted for'ard like a streak and lost himself under the fo'-c'sle head. But Isabel had so much way on her she just kept on going; she just turned a flip-flop over the coaming and down she went, out o' sight, into the open hatch.

Well, this was kind o' serious; and we looked at each other, and we says—

"Oh, my, what'll she do to us now?"

It was just like that Isabel to spoil an innocent bit o' fun by jumpin' into the hold. Just at the minute when Captain Tunnicliffe was roused up and startin' for'-ard; just when the old girl herself come bargin' out o' the cabin, in her blue kimono and with her hair all flyin'! We knew Isabel wasn't killed because the most horrible howls was comin' out o' the hatch; but maybe she had a busted leg or somethin', and that would mean murder at least if we knew Lady Violet.

We all reached the hatch about the same time, because us fellers wasn't in such a hurry to get there as them folks from aft. So they looked over the after edge, and we looked over the for'ard edge, and there was little ookums about six foot down prancin' around on top o' the coal. Wasn't nothin' wrong with her except her bad temper, and as soon as she seen us fellers she begun to snarl and show her teeth. But she was a spar-colored dog, and rollin' on the coal wasn't doin' her looks any good.

That's what made the old girl mad—little precious gettin' all smeared up with coal-dust. My eye, she was fair wild! She jawed at us and she jawed at Isabel, and all in the same breath, and we was certainly glad that the hatch was between us.

"You brutes, you cowards, you!" she sings out. "Yes, honey, mamma's here. You'll suffer for this. I'll get you out, dearie! You this-and-that and so-and-so. Oh, don't roll on that coal or I'll spank you good. You riff and raff, you're to blame for this. Oh, get her, somebody; get her!"

Now she didn't see Nep ride that pup, and she didn't know how Isabel got down there. But she blamed us right away. That's a woman for you. No sense o' justice at all.

The carpenter had come out o' the after house to see what the row was about, and he was standin' by the old girl's side, puffin' his pipe and lookin' down at Isabel. He wasn't exactly sorry; you could see that from the way his mustache was twitchin'. It was only the other day that Isabel bit him in the pants when he was calkin' the deck, him bendin' over and unprotected, and all the satisfaction he got was that woman sayin' to him:

"*Hump!* Well, it serves you good and right, and maybe next time you'll get out o' Isabel's way."

That's why he wasn't sorry now when Isabel was gettin' the worst o' it, and pretty soon his feelin's got the better o' him and he snickered out loud.

That snicker done for him. Oh, my eye! Lady Violet grabbed him quicker than a wink. She got him by his shoulders and pretty near shook the daylights out o' him, him bein' a little feller and her bein' the size she was. We just about heard poor Chips' bones rattle. It looked like he had three pipes in his mouth instead o' one, his head was waggin' so fast. All the time she was talkin'.

"You cruel beast," says she, "tormentin' a poor dumb animal with your smiles and your snickers! I'll teach you," she says. "Now you go right down there and hand Isabel up to me, and if you so much as lay a finger on her I swear I'll wring your neck!"

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She give him a shove, and he pretty near went head first into the hatch. Well, he slid his legs down on to the ladder mighty quick. He didn't argue. No, sir, nobody wanted to argue with that woman. Captain Tunnicliffe says, "Go ahead and do what she says, Chips," and the mate, he didn't say a thing. He just leaned back against the main fiferail and looked disgusted.

Now I was lookin' down the hatch, and I seen just what happened with my own eyes. I'd have taken oath to it in court if they ever called me, which o' course they never did.

The cargo had shaken itself down, you see, which was only natural, and here in the hatch it had shaken down a bit lower than in the hold proper, so it was sort o' bowl, or cone-shaped. Well, just as soon as Chips landed on the coal, he give a sneeze, and he took his pipe out o' his mouth and says—

"Captain, it's pretty strong down here; I can fair taste it."

"Stop your jaw and get Isabel, or I'll lose my patience next!" sings out Lady Violet.

"You better do what she says," was all the skipper had to say.

So Chips put his pipe back in his mouth —mind you that!—and he got down on his knees and hands and started to crawl down this bowl-shape hole after Isabel, and Isabel started to back away from him and show her teeth. She backed right down to the bottom.

"Nice doggie; come, doggie," says Chips. "Here, doggie, I'll take you to mamma," says he.

And just as Isabel was goin' to run up the other side o' the slope he reached out and grabbed her by her hind leg.

"Pretty doggie," says he, and Isabel bit his hand.

"—— and blazes!" says Chips.

He opened his mouth to sing it out loud, and his pipe fell. Yes, sir, I seen it with my own eyes, just how it happened. The pipe fell; the bowl o' it hit a lump of coal, and all the burnin' tobacco spilled out. It spilled out right at the bottom o' this depression I've told about. And Chips sings out—

"—— and blazes!"

That's just what happened —— and blazes. Seemed like Chips was callin' for it, and it come. I seen—all hands seen—a sort o' greenish flame scootin' this way and that down the bottom where the burnin' tobacco fell.

And then— Oh, well, I ain't got words to tell it. But it was just like something sucked all the air away for a minute. And then comes a big *poof!* like, and the whole top o' the cargo in the hatch just sort o' lifted up, and the air was full o' coal-dust and green smoke with lumps o' coal and what looked like arms and legs turnin' around in the cloud. The air was full o' coal-gas, and we all choked on it.

When I got my eyes cleared and my breath workin' the cloud was pretty well settled down, and there right close to Lady Violet was standin' the remains o' the carpenter.

My eye, his own mother wouldn't have known that man, and she'd have called the police if he knocked on her door. Why, he was a wreck, half his mustache gone and his clothes blown into so many Irish pennants, and himself as black as the coal itself.

He was holdin' something in his hand, and at first I couldn't make it out, it looked so queer. Then I seen it was Isabel. And Isabel was just hangin' limp, without a bark or bite left in her. She was a coal color too, and what made her look so strange was that all the beautiful long hair was singed off her hide and only a sort o' black frizzle was left in patches.

"Here you are, ma'am," says the carpenter, speakin' thick because o' the mud in his mouth.

"Oh, Isabel!" shrieked Lady Violet.

"Oh, dear me!" says Captain Tunnicliffe.

"Oh, ——" (somethin' else) sings out the mate. "Get them hatch-covers on, you lubbers! Man that deck-pump! Don't you see she's afire?"

There was another big *poof!* like, away for'ard.

"Never mind; too late," says Mr. Heath.

We looked for'ard, and there was another black-green cloud, and hatch-covers and tarpaulins and chunks o' coal, all dancin' around in the belly o' the fores'l. The fore hatch had blew up too.

FOR two days and two nights we done everything that could be done. It wasn't a bit o' use. It was this spotty combustion I told you about. Of course, it was Chip's pipe that

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touched her off first go, but after that it was just *poof!* here and *poof!* there all over the hold.

We tried to smother the fire and it got worse; we tried to drown it, and it spread faster. Then the timbers began to burn, and on the afternoon o' the third day, when the deck was beginnin' to cave in, we took to the boats.

Now you'd think from her bein' such a bossy dame that the Lady Violet would bare a hand in fightin' the fire. But no; there mightn't have been any fire from the way she carried on. All the time we was sweatin' and slavin' to save the ship, and haulin' each other out o' the hold when we got full o' smoke and gas, that there woman was layin' around the cabin bawlin' and reproachin' every one who came near her because o' what had happened to her darlin'.

Isabel! That's all that worried her. Little ookums wasn't pretty no more, and besides she was all over blisters where she was scorched. So Lady Violet took all the salve out o' the medicine-chest and rubbed it on the pup, and then she wound fathoms and fathoms o' bandage over the salve until Isabel was the strangest-lookin' animal you ever clapped eyes on.

The carpenter was all over blisters, too, and he couldn't sit down when he rested, but he didn't get no salve or bandages. She says they ain't none to spare. The rest o' us didn't get salve for our burns either. We had to use galley grease and old shirts.

"Serves you right—oh, my poor Isabel!" says she.

Reason, that woman didn't have none, not a speck more than her dog, and no more kind feelin' for others than Isabel had either. When it came to leavin' the ship, why, she raised a holler because she couldn't take her trunks. That's a fact!

Then she says she wouldn't budge an inch, and we all cheered at that and we sung out to Captain Tunnicliffe to let her stay behind with Isabel and put the fire out. So she changed her mind about goin', and got in a great stew about what would she wear. Mind you, the boats was in the water, and the flames was lickin' up toward the fores'l! In the end she went over the rail in her kimono, huggin' Isabel and sayin' she knew it was all a plot to injure her and her precious.

We pulled off a distance and lay to, watchin' the old barky burn. Along towards sunset there was a big explosion in the hold, to judge from the dust and flame, and it must have opened her up wide below water because she began to settle in a hurry; then the decks blew up, and we heard that noise, and over she rolled and went down by the head.

"Good-by," we all says, and Captain Tunnicliffe cried a bit.

Pretty soon he blew his nose, and he says:

"Well, lads, cheer up; it ain't so bad. We're only four hundred miles or so off the coast, and right in the path o' ships. So we'll splice the main brace, and then we'll make sail and lay a course."

"Aye, aye, captain," says we, and we was cheered up considerable by the words.

So Captain Tunnicliffe poked around the stuff that was piled at his feet, there in the stern o' the boat. He put his hand in a box and pulled out a can o' condensed milk.

"What's this?" says he. "Steward, where's that case o' rum I told you to put in this boat?"

"Right there at your feet, captain," sings out the steward, who was in the bows.

"You can stop lookin' for it right now," speaks up the Lady Violet, "because you won't find it."

"Why, why, my love—" says the skipper.

"If you think for a minute that a lady like me would come in a boat like this with a lot o' men what are the drags on society, and sit by calm while you and them guzzle your selves stiff," says she, "why, you got another think comin', that's all. You won't find that case o' rum because I threw it out, and I put that milk there instead. Well, what you got to say about it—any o' you?"

We didn't any of us have anything to say except the skipper. He says—

"Yes, my love."

Then he tried to make us feel a little better about it.

"Maybe it's for the best, lads," says he. "Canned milk is very nourishin', and it will make your hardtack more palpable."

"That milk is for Isabel," says Lady Violet, "and if any o' you riff and raff lay a finger on a can o' it I'll lam you with the tiller-post. You understand that, don't you?"

We didn't any of us say anything; but

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Isabel, she lifted her head and give a little yip to show she agreed; and the skipper says—

"Yes, my love."

Then up speaks the steward.

"Please, ma'am, I ain't talkin' for myself," says he, "and if I was, why, I'd say let Isabel swaller that milk, cans, labels and all, because that's just how I feel about that dear little doggie, ma'am. I wouldn't ask for it myself, ma'am, or for any o' these fellers, but if Isabel could spare just one can for Nep, seein' that canned milk is the natural food o' cats—"

The old girl stiffened up sudden.

"What's that? Have you got that there cat in this boat?" she sings out.

"Yes, ma'am; I couldn't leave him to burn, seein' as how we've been shipmates since he was able to walk," says the steward, just as nice and mild o' manner as he could act. "I'm sittin' on him. He's in this locker, along with the painter and the sea-anchor. And you could just spare one——"

Her voice got screechy.

"Elmer, do you hear that?" she says. "That—that animal what made Isabel get hurt is in this boat! Elmer, you tell him to throw that horrid cat into the ocean, right away! Elmer, you heard what I said!"

Well, seein' as how he was so scared o' his wife, I guess the skipper would have told us, just as she said. But he didn't get a chance. No, sir. This was the last blow that broke our back, as the sayin' is. We all hands busted out talkin' at once, and what we said was we would be —— if we'd dump Neptune. Then when we was a bit out o' breath, Joe Thomas, who was always a slick lad with the gab, spoke up loud.

"If the cat goes overboard, the dog does too," says he, and we all says, "Aye, aye," to that.

"Oh, Isabel!" yells Lady Violet, and she hugs the dog there in her lap like she thought we was goin' to snatch her away.

I guess we all looked like we wanted to.

"Because how many livin' souls is aboard this boat?" Joe Thomas goes on. "Why, captain, there is you, and the Mrs., and Mr. Hansen, that's three; and there's eight o' us hands, that's eleven; and there's steward, that's twelve, and Isabel is thirteen and Nep is fourteen. Now if we dump Nep how many does that leave? And what kind o' chance for life will we have, bein' that number in an open boat?"

Now there was logic for you! It was true, too. Who ever heard of a boat containin' thirteen ever bein' picked up? Why, that Jonah number would pretty near swamp a big ship. So we all says, "Aye, aye," very hearty to what Joe Thomas says.

Captain Tunnicliffe didn't answer Joe anything, but he whispered something to his wife. She says—

"I don't care what you do so long as that cat goes."

So then the skipper says—

"Step the mast, boys, and we'll close in with the mate's boat."

But we discovered right then it wasn't no use to step a mast. It was just our luck, and what we might expect from havin' a Jonah like Isabel with us. While that woman was takin' up so much time jawin' us, the wind, which was very light anyway, died away altogether; and there we was in a flat calm, and driftin' away from the mate's boat. We had to out oars and pull for it, us poor fellers who was near dead, we was so tired. All so Isabel could sleep quiet after we'd shipped steward and the cat into the mate's boat.

The mate's boat was layin' to about a quarter of a mile away, the last time we seen her. It was too dark to make her out now, but Mr. Heath was showin' a light and the Old Man steered for that.

Well, after we pulled for about five minutes Mr. Hansen sings out of a sudden—

"Oh, yimminy, here comes da fog down!"

It did. My eye, it come down regular Bering Sea fashion, which is a fashion o' fog on the California coast that time o' year, though none o' us had ever before seen it come down like that so far off the coast. It was the currents, I guess, and the hot weather we had been havin'. Anyway down it comes, and one minute we was pullin' that boat in clear weather, and the next minute we was lost in a gray mist.

"This is very annoyin'," says Captain Tunnicliffe. "In oars, lads; no use blunderin' about in this."

Then he hailed the mate's boat, and we heard Mr. Heath's reply. Some o' us swore the mate's hail come from astern o' us, and some from ahead, and others said, no, it was to port, or starboard. That's the sort o' tricks fog plays with sounds; there ain't no direction in a fog.

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Well, the skipper sings out to Mr. Heath to lay to until mornin' or until the fog lifted, and we come together; and the mate sings out, "Aye, aye," and we settled down right where we was for the night.

It got cold and dank, and we felt pretty miserable, and most o' us was dressed light. Then we hadn't been eatin' regular since the fire stared, and the sip o' water, and biscuit and beef we had for supper didn't go very far. So we sat huddled up on the thwarts, tryin' to keep warm with our pipes, and listenin' to poor Nep yowlin' and scratchin' there in the bows, and listenin' to Isabel slobberin' and guzzlin' over her feed in a most disgustin' fashion. We had a lot to talk about—that case o' rum which would have kept us all warm and rosy if it wasn't for a crazy woman, and how that poor cat was starvin' because o' a stingy woman, and such talk; and we didn't lower our voices none either, because we was fed up, and anyway she couldn't tell who was who in the dark and fog.

But do you think we fazed that woman? Why, we might have been talkin' Chinese for all the notice she took!

Every so often we'd all hands hail the other boat, and they'd answer. Then along towards mornin' they didn't answer no more, though we pretty near split our throats.

"This is very annoyin'," says the skipper. "Are you warm, my love?"

"Shut your mouth, all o' you," says his love. "You make my head ache with your hollerin', and you've woke up Isabel."

Poor sufferin' woman, and her sittin' there with nothin' around her but three thick blankets, and Isabel wrapped in the fourth! They was all the blankets we had in the boat, too.

WHEN day come, why, it didn't do us no good. Things looked dismaler, if anything. My eye, that fog was thick! It was pretty near thick enough to bite chunks out of.

We had our snack, and then we pulled about lookin' for the mate. We didn't find him or hear him, and after a while the skipper give it up, and laid a course by compass. We couldn't sail without wind, so it was, "Bend your backs, me hearties!" Well, we didn't mind that much; it kept us warm. But that longboat was mortal heavy and we was all worn out, so you can fancy we didn't bust no records with our rowing.

Come night again; and it was like last night, only worse. The fog was there, and the cold was there; and worse than that, we knew a break was comin' in the weather, and not the sort o' break we was lookin' for. Those o' us who was weather-wise could feel it; and if a feller leaned over the gunwale he could see the scummy-lookin' sea sliding by in long rollers. There was weather makin'; there was dirt comin' out o' the nor'east, which was where we was bound for; and I ask you what sort o' shape was we in to meet a head gale?

We was sittin' there growlin' and feelin' mighty blue, and steward's voice come from the bows, and he says that Nep turned down his whack o' biscuit and beef. We could hear him yowlin' small and pitiful-like in that locker for'ard.

All at once Joe Thomas, who was sittin' on the after thwart, ripped out a cuss, and he says—

"If Nep wants milk he's goin' to have milk!"

What does he do but get up and step towards Lady Violet, who is sittin' in the stern sheets with Isabel on her lap. This box o' milk is right beside her, and Joe's hand dived into it before the old girl could catch her breath.

He surprized her, but not Isabel. That dog had an eye on her grub, and she just reached out and clamped down on Joe's arm. Joe busted her in the jaw, a good one, and she let go.

Then Lady Violet had caught her breath, and she busted Joe in the jaw, and he went tumblin' back over the thwart. This can o' milk he had nabbed flew out o' his hand and sailed for'ard, and there was a loud grunt when it hit the steward in the pit o' his stomach.

"You hand that back, you thief!" the Lady Violet yells. "Oh, Elmer, Elmer, they're stealin' Isabel's milk! Do you hear? You bring that back this minute!"

"I ain't got it," says Joe Thomas, gettin' up and rubbin' his jaw. "It bounced out o' my hand when you swung on me," he says.

"You're a liar," she says. "I heard it land among you. Elmer, make them hand it back. Oh, Isabel! Elmer, he hurt Isabel! Her mouth is all wet! Oh—it's blood!"

"That's my blood," says Joe.

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"Serves you right, you thievin' rascal!" says she, reachin' for him with the tiller-post. "I'll teach you wretches."

And she thumped the thwart, and cracked Scotty Fraser on the head. Yes, sir, she went for us, screechin' we was thieves and swingin' with that tiller-post so the fellers on the after thwarts had to tumble off their seats and crowd into the bows. I guess she'd have climbed the thwarts after us, and then we'd have had to lay her out, lady or no lady; but the skipper and Mr. Hansen got hold of her and got her back to her seat.

Joe Thomas was pretty sore, and you can't blame him either; and when that women kept on urgin' the captain to get back the can o' milk he spoke up and says slow and distinct—

"We're openin' the can and pourin' it into Frank Green's cap, and Neptune is going to eat every speck o' it."

That started her ravin' again, just like Joe expected. She talked somethin' fierce to the captain and says he's a coward, and so is the second mate, that they don't take that milk away from us. But they don't try, you bet; and they let her rave on. The skipper knew we was pretty savage and not to be monkeyed with. But do you think he could make her believe that?

"Rats! I'll clean them out by myself," says she when he whispered it to her. "Why, Elmer, do you realize there ain't but twelve cans o' milk left in that box, and when that's used up what are we to do? The little darlin' just can't eat this coarse food. Why, that can o' milk them scallywags took might have been the savin' o' her!"

It was just about the savin' o' Neptune, we thought. My eye, didn't that cat tear into it when steward lifted him out o' the locker where he'd kept him shut up! It done us a world of good, just to listen to him lap and purr. We says to each other we was sorry we hadn't got that milk sooner.

We talked pretty free, and while what we said was for ourselves we didn't lower our voices none. If she wanted to listen to our private conversation, why, that was her lookout. That's the way we felt about it.

We talked about how long we'd likely be in the boat, and we says that with dirty weather maybe comin' we'd likely be swamped, and if we wasn't, why, there was the matter o' provisions to think of. And then we wondered which was the best eatin', cats or dogs.

"Cats is stringy and tough, and not any better than boots," says Scotty.

He says he tasted cat once in a Shanghai chop-house. So we all says we would leave Nep to the last.

"Dogs ain't so bad," says Joe Thomas. "They ain't stringy and tough—leastways not a nice, clean, hand-fed pup like Isabel, what never did a day's work in her life. She'll be nice and tender."

"And nourishin'," says the steward. "When I was tradin' about the Philippine Islands I noticed that the Bolos in them parts ate dog regular; and they are a husky lot, them Bolos, I can tell you. I'll make shift to build a fire here in the boat, and I'll roast her for you."

Just about then the Lady Violet was havin' hysterics all over the stern sheets. She showed plain that she'd been eavesdroppin' on us.

"Did you hear them, Elmer?" she cries. "The dirty cannibals is plannin' to eat Isabel!"

And then she told him to shoot us. And then she says—

"You coward, give me your pistol, and if you won't I will."

And then she give a scream:

"Oh, Isabel; oh, Isabel! They got Isabel!"

No, we didn't have Isabel. But the pup was in trouble just the same. What happened was this: When the old girl started to use her hands to argue with the Old Man, why, Isabel slipped out o' her lap and started for'ard under the thwarts to see about this strange smell o' cat she's been smellin' lately.

I tell you, that dog didn't have no sense. Nep wouldn't have touched her if she'd stayed aft where she belonged. But when she come lookin' for him and trouble—well, there's limits to what a tomcat will stand.

There they was, spittin' and yelpin', and yowlin' and howlin', all over the bottom o' the boat. My eye, what a racket! Us yellin', and Lady Violet screechin', and Isabel makin' more noise than the lot o' us. Nep was a pretty silent fighter, but that Isabel—well, I guess this time Nep had his claws in her bandages and was rubbin' blisters the wrong way.

She howled, howled, howled! These

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long, blood-curdlin' howls what seem to last forever, and it's a mystery to me how such howls could come out o' a dog that was, Lady Violet always said, extra large peek-and-ease, and pretty near pure strain.

Captain Tunnicliffe caught them at last when they rolled near enough to him, and he pulled them apart. Nep scooted for'ard and hid in the bows, just like he always done aboard ship. He was a wise cat.

And Isabel—well, Captain Tunnicliffe just up and kicked Isabel into the stern. He did! We seen it plain. It was dark and foggy for'ard, but aft Mr. Hansen was holding up the lantern, and we seen plain just what the Old Man did.

He kicked Isabel under the stern sheets, and he swore when he did it. Then he grabbed Lady Violet by her shoulders and he shook her, and he sat her down with a bang and near threw us off our feet with the sudden list it gave the boat.

Lady Violet was gaspin' like a fish, catchin' breath and words. But she never got fairly started.

"Shut up!" says the captain.

She shut up.

We would have shut up, too; and as it was we nearly fell over, we was that surprized. Just them two words—

"Shut up!"

It was the way he said it. His voice hadn't changed none, but just them two words, and we knew it was a real boss who was speakin' them. That's it! They weren't like any two words we'd ever before heard from Captain Tunnicliffe. No, sir. Them two words—well, them two words had guts behind them, d'ye understand?

He spoke to us next.

"Sit down, you men, and keep quiet," says he.

No more than that. But we sat down, and we kept quiet.

Isabel come out and whined, and the skipper kicked her back under the seat. That started Lady Violet. She opened her mouth, and she tried to get up.

"Sit down and stay down," says Captain Tunnicliffe, pushin' her back, and bein' noways gentle about it, either. "Listen to me, madam; I'm sick and tired o' your carryin' on," says he. "Now if there is another bit o' fuss in this boat over that dog, I'll heave the brute overboard with my own hands. D'ye hear me?"

"Yes, Elmer," says Lady Violet, and she says it in a voice so meek-like we couldn't hardly believe it was her.

"Keep quiet, y'swabs, or I'll take the heavy end o' an oar to you!" says the captain to us when we begin to buzz about it. "And you, steward, pop that cat back into the locker, and if he comes out again without my permission, overboard he goes! D'ye hear me?"

We did. Nep went back, and we piped down and was like mice for quiet.

Then the skipper put half o' us to the oars again, not pulling really, but keepin' her head on the course and ourselves warm. It was spell and spell about, and them off duty tried to snooze in the bottom.

He didn't spell himself, though. He sat there in the stern beside his wife, stiff as a handspike, and every time Isabel would try to sneak out from under the seat and get in Lady Violet's lap he kicked her back again.

Once she says in that meek voice that we could hardly believe our ears was hers—

"Can I have Isabel in my lap?" she says.

"No, you can't," says Captain Tunnicliffe, very prompt. "I'm sick o' seein' Isabel in your lap."

That was all. Not a peep out o' her. It was that strange a body could hardly believe it. But it was so, and you can't imagine the difference it made to us fellers on the thwarts. The night didn't seem so cold and long any more, and things in general didn't look so black. Us fellers had quit worryin'.

Now that's mighty funny, and I kept puzzlin' about it. And then all at once I got it.

Captain Tunnicliffe says to Lady Violet:

"Violet, hand me the blanket you had wrapped about the dog. I want it."

She handed it over, and after he wrapped Mr. Hansen, who was sleepin' in it, he says—

"Now take two o' them three blankets off your back and pass them for'ard to cover the lads layin' on the bottom."

She did.

"The rest o' this voyage it's share and share alike," says he. "D'ye hear me, Violet?"

"Yes, Elmer," says she.

That's when I got it. We had a proper skipper over us, that's what made the difference. Sailors ain't made for worryin';

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they're made for work. Worryin' is for officers. That's why we had been growlin' and miserable, and hatin' Lady Violet, and wishin' we had Mr. Heath in the boat.

But now we knew we didn't need Mr. Heath. We didn't know why; we just knew it, that's all. Somethin' had happened to poor old Jellyfish Tunnicliffe, and he had suddenly got a backbone, and he was behavin' the way an officer should behave, and from despisin' him, why, all at once we was respectin' him.

No, it wasn't just that he was puttin' his wife in her place and keepin' her there. It was some sort o' change that had took place inside o' him. We couldn't see it or hear it, but you bet we could feel it. It was just that we felt that now he was the sort o' man us fellers could put trust in. That's it!

THE calm didn't break that night, but the long rollers comin' down from the nor'east got bigger and bigger until a nasty sea had got up. We had to work then, all hands, to keep her head to it, and it wasn't no cheerful prospect to know that a gale o' wind was comin' down on us.

Still we didn't worry. Why, we felt easier in our minds than we had since leavin' the ship. That's what it meant to us to have a proper skipper in charge.

If he worried he didn't show it none, which was right and proper. He just sat there hummin' a chantey, and now and then snappin' out an order. Then just before dawn when the black begun to get gray he sings out cheerily—

"The fog's thinnin' out, lads, and we'll see where we're goin' pretty soon."

So we did. My blinkin' eye, but we did! The sun come up, and the fog just melted away out o' its path. And what did we see about a mile and a half to leeward o' us but a whoppin' big S. O. tanker standin' by with signals flyin'! There she was, like a picture on a wall, with the fog-bank behind her and the sun sparklin' the sea before her. And in a couple o' minutes we seen a puff o' steam from her whistle, and we knew she had sighted us.

She swung around and came steamin' up to us, and we went rowing like mad down to her; and, my eye, an angel out o' heaven wouldn't have looked so good to us fellers as that ugly old tanker! She was the *Oleum*, o' 'Frisco, Captain Fitzgerald, and the very next year I made two voyages to Borneo in her. But never did she look so good to me as she did that mornin'.

They was cheerin' us as we pulled around her stern, and when we got alongside and looked up, why, there was Mr. Heath and our own fellers aboard o' her. A few minutes later when we was on her decks and drinkin' the hot coffee they met us with, Captain Fitzgerald says to Captain Tunnicliffe:

"Didn't pick you up none too soon, captain. Weather making, and the radio tells me it's a rip-snorter."

"I'd have weathered it, sir," says Captain Tunnicliffe; and, by golly, there wasn't one o' us didn't believe he would have, too.

"So this is Isabel?" says Captain Fitzgerald, squintin' at the pup, which Lady Violet was holdin' once again in her arms, havin' brought her aboard. "Do you know, I've been lookin' for you ever since I run down your mate and picked up him and his men, night before last. Last night I made up my mind it was hopeless, and I'd missed you. In fact, captain, I went on my course again.

"And then my lookouts reported a most peculiar sound comin' out o' the fog, just whereaway they couldn't make out. And it didn't sound like a dog to any o' us, but your mate swore there was only one creature alive could make that sort o' noise, and that creature was your Isabel! So he persuaded me to lay by until this mornin'. Lucky for you, eh? Lucky dog, eh?"

"Maybe so, if you think dogs is lucky," says Captain Tunnicliffe. "I don't."

He turned to Lady Violet.

"Put that thing down, Violet!" says he.

Violet dropped Isabel like she was a hot potato. Then Captain Tunnicliffe lifted the pup a few feet along the deck with his boot.

"Take her, captain; she's yours," says he to Captain Fitzgerald. "Give her to your sailors. Make her your mascot. Do what you —— please with her. She don't belong to my family any more."

Well, you could have heard a pin drop on that deck. I guess the mate had been explainin' Lady Violet and Isabel to them fellers on the *Oleum*, because Captain Fitzgerald and his officers and all hands of us just turned and stared at Lady Violet. Poor Mr. Heath looked like he thought he

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was goin' crazy and didn't hear right.

The Lady Violet didn't so much as take a good-by look after Isabel. Now, that's a solemn fact. She just looked at her husband; and I seen—all of us seen—that she had just that same look in her eyes that she used to give Isabel. It was a sort o' cow-like look she had when she talked to oo-kums like ookums was a real baby.

She opened her mouth, but what she said was in a sort o' coo.

"Oh-h-h, Elmer!" says she.

SOME AMERICAN ALCALDES

by John L. Considine

A JUSTICE of the supreme court, mounted on horseback and armed with a Winchester, was O. Henry's definition of a *rurale;* and, barring the horse and the Winchester, the same would apply to an alcalde of the old Californian days. This refers particularly to the powers of the American alcaldes who came in after the conquest of Mexico.

They had a profound contempt for the amenities of life, refinements of reasoning or elegance of expression. They depended on "horse sense" for their decisions, and, while easily swayed by a shrewd or skilful advocate, had no use for any one who referred to law books, used legal phraseology or indulged in expressions that they did not understand.

On one occasion, when Alcalde William B. Almond was trying a trivial case, an attorney referred to his opponent as "an oscillating Tarquin."

"A what?" roared Almond.

"An oscillating Tarquin," answered the puzzled attorney, at a loss to account for the court's evident wrath.

The alcalde removed his feet from the desk whereon they had been reposing, relieved his jaws of a tremendous cud of tobacco and wagged his forefinger warningly at the lawyer.

"If this honorable court knows herself," he exclaimed in stentorian tones, "and she thinks she do, that remark is an insult to this honorable court. You are fined two ounces and stand committed till you come down with the dust."

"But, your honor—" began the unfortunate advocate, who certainly did not relish the idea of parting with nearly forty dollars for the luxury of indulging in a classical allusion.

"Silence, sir!" roared the indignant judge. "This honorable court won't tolerate cussing and never goes back on her decisions."

The lawyer paid the fine, and thereafter, as long as Almond remained alcalde, refrained from classical allusions.

R. S. Ham, the first alcalde of Tuolumne County, is said to have assumed the office without the formality of a vote even. With an eye possibly to a future election, he always kept his ear to the ground, and wo betide the accused in his court whose cause or personality was at variance with popular feeling. Ham would invariably give him the limit; and the limit from one whose powers were practically illimitable was something to dread.

He lost his office through this trait. He ordered into confinement an unpopular person accused of theft, and in due course would doubtless have ordered him hanged. But the man had one influential friend, Charles Bassett. Bassett called for an election and put up for the office of alcalde James Fraser, who was very popular. Fraser was elected, thus automatically disposing of Ham, and Bassett's friend was saved.

Fraser did not long remain alcalde. A gambler named Atkins, who had been roughly handled by miners, turned loose with a shotgun and killed a man named Boydan. As Boydan had not been one of the assailants, but had on the contrary striven to get Atkins out of their hands, there was a clamor for a lynching. But order prevailed, and Atkins was tried before Alcalde Fraser and a jury.

The jury found him guilty of murder, and Fraser sentenced him to pay a fine of five hundred dollars and to leave the county. The sentence vexed Boydan's friends, one of whom announced that he was going to

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kill the alcalde and would be glad to forfeit five hundred dollars for that luxury. Fraser, who was a man of prudence, resigned the office.

The neighboring town of Columbia had for alcalde a Major Sullivan, who acted always on the principle that the laborer is worthy of his hire. A Mexican, charged with stealing a pair of leggings, was fined three ounces, while the prosecuting witness was fined one ounce for troubling the court with such a trivial complaint. All fines, it should be mentioned, went into the pocket of the alcalde.

On another occasion, when the rightful owner sued for a mule, the defendant was ordered to restore it and to pay one ounce fine and three ounces costs. As he did not have the gold-dust, Sullivan ordered the plaintiff to pay both fine and costs, on the ground that the court could not be expected to sit without remuneration.

All the alcaldes seem to have had an eye to the main chance. "Get the money" was their motto, and in pursuing this practise they sometimes misled the defendant as to their ultimate intentions. A young fugitive, who had stolen a purse of gold-dust, was overtaken and brought back to face the alcalde, who listened patiently to the evidence, and at its conclusion quietly remarked to the prisoner—

"The court thinks it right that you should return the dust to its owner."

The culprit cheerfully complied.

"The court thinks you ought to pay the cost of the proceedings."

On being informed that the amount was two ounces, the young man gladly turned it over, thinking himself well out of a bad fix. But the court was not yet through.

"And now," he continued, with a twinkle in his eye, "there is another part of the sentence that has not yet been mentioned; and that is, that you receive thirty-nine lashes on your back, well laid on."

Ezekiel Dougherty, first justice of the peace of Nevada City, was another character. A strong case, based on purely circumstantial evidence, was made out against a man brought before him, charged with horse-stealing. The counsel for the defense, after dwelling on the danger of such testimony, announced his intention of calling witnesses to the good character of his client. But Uncle Zeke, as he was generally called, interrupted with—

"What the —— is the use of trying to prove his character when he is already proved to be a —— thief?"

In another criminal trial when the case, as presented by the prosecution, had convinced Uncle Zeke, the lawyer for the defense arose, and, giving indications of an intention to make a long speech, began with—

"Your honor, it is a presumption of law that a man is innocent until he is proved guilty."

Uncle Zeke, tired and thirsty, ceased his uneasy twistings in his chair, jumped to his feet, and exclaimed:

"Yes, but there is another presumption of law; and that is, that a justice of the peace is not bottomed with cast-iron. You may go on with your speech, but I am going after my bitters, and I am going right now."

Lawyer Leander Quint of Sonora, for whom Alcalde R. C. Barry entertained a violent dislike, had lost the first three fingers of his right hand. In argument he would gesticulate violently with this hand, extending the remaining thumb and little finger in a manner that annoyed Barry excessively. After a trial in which Barry had as usual ruled against him, Quint exclaimed—

"Judge, I never did stand any chance in your court!"

"No sir," replied Barry, "and you never shall. When a man comes into court and wriggles his fingers and rolls up his eyes as you do, he can't have any show here. In Texas we have man-traps, sir, that cost thieves their fingers. It looks —— suspicious, sir, it looks —— suspicious; but I hope it's all right."

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HELL'S HALF-WAY HOUSE

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Author of "Game In the Bush," "Three Prongs," etc.

VAN DORN regarded his assistant calmly and silently.

"You haf a poor memory, Mr. Lane," he said, at last.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I have told you many times to wear a coat, collar and tie at dinner. It's one of my rules——"

"But you are in pajamas!" Arthur Lane retorted.

"I'm the agent," Van Dorn replied. "I can do as I please. But I don't want to see you at dinner again without being properly dressed—yoost a matter of discipline."

"All right——"

The Dutchman got up from the table, in indication that the evening meal was at an end.

Lane took the hint and left without another word.

From a small bush-buying station for palm-oil and kernels, Van Dorn had brought the Midway Factory to a flourishing establishment, doing a greater volume of commerce than many of the factories on the Ivory Coast. His success had been phenomenal. The location—midway between the Komoe and Bandama Rivers—may have had something to do with the boom. Nevertheless he had achieved.

Two bungalows; a large building in which were located office and shop where trinkets, print cloth and rum were sold to the natives, who came to sell their kernels and palm-oil; two store-houses where full round-bellied casks awaited shipment to the markets of the world; the work-shed in which the coopers swung their mallets with the rythmic beat of the tom-toms; and the compound planted with tall palm-trees—all gave evidence of industry and prosperity.

When Lane first heard of Van Dorn he conjured the picture of a stout Hollander who smoked a porcelain pipe with a long cherrywood stem and who was good natured and peaceful. He had been surprized to find a tall slim man of about thirty years of age, with the clean-cut features of a cameo, almost femininely beautiful. In spite of his slender limbs he possessed astonishing strength. In a moment of anger he could throw a native the length of the shop.

Arthur Lane had found himself practically in servitude to the agent, who was "massa" to every one on the place from the smallest pan-scrubber in the galley to his white assistant. Though comparatively young Lane had learned not to buck against the tide. He tooks things calmly without desire to impress by outward manifestations. That the Dutchman considered himself superior did not matter. The sausages at breakfast were no less tasty and his Cinzano continued to retain its tang.

The Coast develops a particular fondness for some definite drink, not to the exclusion of all others, but as a decided favorite. The assistant had found his alcoholic affinity in the mellow, tingling Italian vermouth. A glass of the stuff, and petty annoyances were relegated to the background. And so tonight, after leaving Van Dorn, he stretched

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luxuriously on the veranda to enjoy his after-dinner smoke, the lulling drip of the rain from the eaves, the soft murmur of the palm-leaves in the night wind and the satisfying bite of the spirits on his tongue.

Yes, the African Coast was getting him, carrying him along on its leisurely stream of eventless existence. Soon he would become a real Coaster, with the calm outlook of one freed from the rush and bustle of the temperate zone. He had stepped off the world and saw it now whirling by on its head-long course. He might call the Coast a hell-hole, the stink-pot of the earth, yet, after a few years spent by the placid lagoons, the sluggish rivers, or on the shore where the breakers pound eternally like the distant rumble of thunder, he would be loth to settle down to the more exacting, precise conventionality of Europe.

The fellow who works all day in a shop or office, returning at night to his home in a man-made cliff, never knows the fresh exhilaration of a change into cool whites, of gin sipped on the veranda while the crooning songs of the Kroo boys come from the huts by the water. The "Lure of the Tropics" some like to call it. With a scale of living higher than at home, food, drinks, habitation plus a certain salary that amply provides for minor comforts, he could save enough during his stay of two years to live well on his three months leave.

Yes, Lane found himself happy—happier than he had hoped to be. His task would be easy. There was indication that the Hollander might go away on leave. Yes, he, Lane, would be luckier than his predecessors.

The other two had not been lucky. Both were dead now.

Jack Merrit, a year ago, had been taken down with black-water in this very bungalow. The disease had twisted the life out of him in forty-eight hours. He was buried in a distant corner of the concession. A specially ordered headstone from England marked the spot neatly. Twenty-six, he was, Lane's own age. And he was on the eve of going home, after two years, with an excellent health record! Van Dorn referred to this as an example of the Coast's perversity—playing with a man for a long time, and just when he thinks himself safe, out he goes, without leaving a ripple.

Brill, the next assistant, had gone out with ripples—in the river. No body, no headstone, was the firm's economical rule.

A queer chap according to all reports. A short, dapper man with a tiny blond mustache and a cool supercilious manner, he had arrived with a huge phonograph, a case of guns worth a year's salary, on his hand a ring set with a diamond as large as a pea. This ring and his dignified "drunks" were the talk of Bassam, his history public property: Good family, too much money, woman—sent to Africa.

The day before the date set for his departure he had gone to the bluff, a rise of ground overlooking a pool formed by the river, and jumped off. Thus had passed out Assistant Number Two.

Lane had arrived but two weeks before, the lucky one, he continued to tell himself. "He who gathered the plums," as the Dutchman would say. He looked across at the light shining in the main bungalow and winked.

LANE'S cigaret burned his fingers and he flung the stump over the railing to the mangy lawn where it sputtered on the wet grass for a second and then went out. He reached for the tin only to find it empty. No tobacco! Things in general lost their roseate hue. The evening was young. He did not feel like reading. And how can a fellow dream without winding curls of gray smoke to hitch the fancy to?

He might go to the shop. But Van Dorn would see the light and inquire and find something to fuss about. And to borrow from Van Dorn? The idea was not pleasing.

He got up and walked about on the veranda. To himself he seemed a caged lion denied his meat, to the casual observer he would have been a scantily clad, smokeless young man. The longing for a cigaret took complete possession of him. —— the agent! He would not be a slave. He went inside and lighted the lantern, having avoided doing so before because of the cluster of night insects that gather in the glow. He then vaulted the veranda railing.

How silly, when on a legitimate errand to feel like a small boy stealing apples!

Yet this slight diversion from the monotonous routine excited him.

He reached the shop door and inserted the key in the padlock before he remembered a tin of cigarets that had rolled under the bed a few nights previous. Then he had been too lazy for exertion; now he eagerly

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withdrew the key and returned to the bungalow.

The lantern on the floor, he looked under the bed. Perhaps the packet had been found and confiscated by the boy. No, there it was, close to the wall. Silly to suspect the native judging from the dust on the floor. He pulled the bed out, got the tin, brushed off the dust, took a cigaret, lighted it, inhaled the smoke lingeringly, rolling it in his mouth.

About to return the bed to its position, he was attracted by faint markings on the wall partition, below the level of the mattress. Idly curious, he got the lamp. In yellow chalk against the dirty whitewash the characters were ill-shaped and jumbled as if formed in the dark. Lane had difficulty in transcribing. But when he did a cold chill passed over him.

"Poisoned—Merrit——"

Yes, there could be no mistaking. Each letter now stood out clearly.

"Poisoned—Merrit——"

With the back of his hand he wiped his forehead, moist with a sudden perspiration. He could feel his heart thumping against his chest with slow regular beats.

There is a tale in the "Arabian Nights" about a fisherman who found a bottle on the shore, washed up by the waves. And when he opened it a monstrous demon rose and grew until his head touched the clouds. So now Arthur Lane had freed the demon of suspicion, suspicion that did not date from the finding of the writing. Unconsciously he had been storing daily happenings.

There had been from the first an atmosphere of constraint about the place, a sense of something being wrong. Just as with the Dutchman, a fine exterior but a threat underneath. The assistant had soon become aware that Van Dorn was not satisfied with the five percent commission allotted him above his salary but carefully doctored the weekly reports to his own advantage.

The chain of events might not have anything to do with each other, and yet—unconsciously he found his thoughts closing the circle, jumping at conclusions, his suspicions taking definite shape. Absurd, he laughed, trying to purchase reassurance. The writing had been done by a delirious man. The Dutchman's cold, arrogant manner did not justify branding him a murderer. The sane thing was to go to bed, forget this passing "funk" and go to sleep.

He lighted another cigaret.

A step on the veranda—Van Dorn!

No time to push the bed back in place. He reached over and brushed his sleeve against the writing and then turned and faced the agent. Van Dorn had entered and stood in the doorway. The dripping rain from his poncho formed tiny patterns on the floor, shifting and glittering in the lantern's glow. His thin lips were firmly clamped on a cigar, his brown eyes were strangely brilliant and sarcastic.

"I was yoost turning in when I saw your light—and I come to see what you want in der shop——"

"I wanted cigarets and then I remembered I'd left a tin here." explained Lane.

"Yoost so, yoost so. And I shall not have to put you in yail this time, eh?"

"No, indeed——"

"Ah, what was dat?"

The agent had come farther into the room and was looking at the yellow blotch.

"And you move the bed out."

"Yes, for my cigarets. Some darned fool has scribbled on the wall, I guess."

"And you rubbed off with your sleeve?" questioned the Dutchman pointing to Lane's shirt.

"I tried to," he agreed casually.

"When I was an assistant I was careful of my clothes——"

Van Dorn came closer to the wall.

"Poor Merrit! Before he died he asked the boy for crayon and paper, and he draw pictures——"

He sucked at his cigar audibly.

"I sent them all to his mother after he was buried. Pictures here, he draw, I guess."

"Yes, crazy scribbling——"

"Nothing you read?"

Lane looked him straight in the eyes.

"No—nothing."

"I shall talk to the boy. He neglects your room."

With this astonishing solicitude for his assistant's comfort, the Dutchman turned and left the room.

Lane undressed and went to bed. But even the drone of the rain on the roof could not lull him to sleep. In turning back the pages of the past he came across another incident.

They were seated at dinner, the agent opening his mail just arrived from the Coast. His lids were heavy, for he had been sleeping, and his temper short. He did not seem

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to be hungry and from time to time sipped at the glass of port which the boy constantly refilled. Van Dorn's brow had suddenly knit over a black-bordered letter. Lane had wondered when Van Dorn got up and left the room without a word, tiny beads of perspiration bursting out on his forehead.

At length Lane dozed off but not before he had formed a deliberate intention. Anything was better than uncertainty. To nullify his suspicions or prove them—he would find the black-bordered letter.

LUCK favored him.

When he entered the dining-room which was also Van Dorn's living-room, the Dutchman was not in sight. Awaiting a call from within the boys squatted on the veranda in the sun, conversing in low tones. The agent usually slept late. There was little risk of detection. The sideboard was the only piece of furniture that could be used as a place of concealment. Within, Lane found the tin box in which the agent kept his private correspondence.

With a swift glance at the open door and the veranda windows Lane found the letter, and after replacing the box moved back to the table. With a book in his hand as a blind in case Van Dorn should suddenly enter he read the black bordered pages.

DEAR SIRS:

Jack's death came as a great shock to us. He had withstood the climate for so long we had hoped for a safe return. We are grateful for the papers which you so kindly sent us. You will understand that anything of his is very precious. My mother is very anxious to know what became of his jewelry. You did not mention it in your letter. There was a watch, a scarf pin and several rings. We are afraid you may have sent them and the parcel has been lost. Kindly let us know at once.

Mother and I thank you for the interest you bore my brother.

Sincerely yours,
ETHEL MERRIT.

The letter was dated eight months previous.

Resolved to investigate further the contents of the cupboard, Lane returned the letter to the box. He marveled at the Dutchman's carelessness, and yet Van Dorn, as master of the factory, must know that no one would dare risk his wrath. Lane's growing suspicion made him throw away all caution. There was an old cigar box—perhaps—

Lane found it half-full of jewelry, the raw gold of native workmanship, a diamond ring, the stone as large as a pea, a watch monogramed J. S. M., four scarf pins and

other rings. One thing was proven, the Dutchman was a thief, the worst sort of a thief. That he had poisoned Merrit, Lane was now certain. Merrit must have been a man. With the pain gnawing at his belly he had contrived to get chalk to write a warning!

Lane closed the cupboard, surprized to find that the outside world was as calm as before, that nothing had changed about the room when a cataclysm had taken place within himself. Van Dorn was a money-mad maniac! To escape—but how when the Dutchman was master of every Kroo boy on the river. He dare not write, as he had long suspected the agent of opening his outgoing mail. The isolation of the Midway Factory made him entirely helpless.

And yet there was really nothing to fear for the present. He had no valuable jewelry and having so lately arrived his pay had not accumulated. Above all, Van Dorn must not know that he knew.

Outside some one was whistling, quaveringly, atrociously out of tune, "Dear Little Rose," the song hit of a recent play. The whistling broke off in the middle of a bar on a false note. Lane had never heard Van Dorn whistle or sing. This native, whoever he was, must be imitating some white man. Lane stepped to the window. At

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that moment Van Dorn, in pajamas and still disheveled from sleep rushed by him and out. He cursed with the fluency of a five-year sojourn on the Coast. He ran around the corner of the house.

The whistling having started again now ceased abruptly, then was followed by the high-pitched howl of a native. Van Dorn appeared dragging a knock-kneed youth, whom the assistant recognized as a scullion about the kitchen. The Dutchman's heavy fist thudded on the fellow's bony frame. The boy fell to the ground and the agent continued to punish him with savage kicks in the ribs, each one of which brought a deep groan.

Lane, unable to endure the exhibition, interposed between the two.

"You'll hurt him—he's had enough——"

For the first time Van Dorn seemed aware of his presence.

"Get back to your room!"

"I'm not a native lover—but Busto's had enough. I don't believe he meant any harm——"

This was defiance, a defiance, however, which he could not seem to help. He braced himself for the blow. Instead, the Dutchman turned and sat down, sharply ordering the boy to leave. Nothing more happened. The incident appeared to be closed. Lunch was eaten in silence. Between showers the sun steamed the wet plants outside. The room was ominously quiet, a stillness disturbed only by the clatter of dishes as the serving boy deftly removed the emptied plates. A few flies buzzed in leizurely circles over the table. From the galley echoed at intervals the laughter of the servants, jeering at Busto for having been beaten.

After coffee had been served, the Dutchman addressed Lane.

"Never again get in my way. I run this house! You savvy—yoost me!"

"I am unable to stand for beating the boys. I can't help it——"

The Dutchman continued to stare at him. There was something magnetic in the pale green eyes, in the mad light behind the pupil, that flickered and flashed intermittently with the man's every mood. Lane held his gaze for a few seconds, then turned his head away. Van Dorn did not speak again but got up presently and went to his room.

That afternoon Busto appeared in the shop's office for his pay.

"Why massa be angry so?" the assistant questioned as he handed over the few francs due.

"He no like I whistle dem t'ing."

"What thing?"

"Dem t'ing Massa Brill he sing all time."

"So Brill sang it——"

"Yassah, massa."

"Why massa no like 'em?" pressed the assistant.

"I no savvy. Maybe he no like because Massa Brill he die for river—maybe so—I no savvy."

"Why you whistle 'em, eh?"

"I no t'ink——"

"You no savvy nothing! You be —— fool too much. Get out!"

"I go, massa."

After he had gone Lane restlessly paced the floor.

"This leads straight to a mad-house!" he muttered, recalling his burst of temper with the boy. But the more he dwelt on the state of affairs at the factory the more nervous he became. "Midway Factory!" he laughed. "Hell's half-way house is more to the point!"

To be annoyed by Brill's favorite song, Van Dorn must be troubled by remorse. Merrit poisoned; Brill pushed into the river! Here he was face to face with a problem that would have seemed overdrawn even in a penny dreadful. Dealing thus with a madman he must protect himself at every point. He made his way across the compound to his bungalow. His automatic in his pocket give him a sense of security.

He opened the clothes-press and reached up to the shelf, higher than his head. Groping he recognized by touch, field-glasses, a thermos bottle, shoes. Then he stood on a chair and looked more carefully. The gun was gone! Since the day of his arrival he had not moved it from its holster where it had been cradled, protected from rust, the barrel filled with vaseline.

He tried to keep cool, tried not to give way to the panic that was about to overwhelm him. Why had Van Dorn taken the weapon? Why unless to render him absolutely helpless! If there were only some way to escape. But the Kroo boys on the river were all in Van Dorn's pay, all wholly subservient to him—all except Busto. And what good would Busto be alone, without a canoe. And then it suddenly came to Lane, a way in which he could use the native,

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break down Van Dorn's morale, drive him to take his leave perhaps before he found out that his assistant knew the truth. Then, before he came back, Lane could communicate with the authorities in Grand Bassam.

It was several hours before he succeeded in finding Busto, getting him back to the shop where, alone with him, he could explain his plan.

"Do you want to catch plenty money?" Lane asked.

"Yassah!"

"You no go tell anybody?"

"Nossah!"

"Tonight—chop time—you come outside bungalow whistle—like Massa Brill. Savvy?"

Busto's face fell.

"Massa, he go kill me——"

"He no see you night-time. You no come close for house. You stop for bush outside compound. Savvy?"

"How much you give me?"

"Five francs."

"He no be good."

"Ten francs."

Cupidity and fear struggled for mastery. The black nodded.

"Ten francs be good."

On the surface dinner was a repetition of all their other evening meals. The rain beat on the roof. The drain-pipe gurgled like a drowning man. The steam came in from the outside and cloaked the lamp with a thin fog, around which the night insects fluttered with whirring wings. Under the veneer of calm there was a presage of trouble, the sense of impending catastrophe. Lane felt the Dutchman's gaze upon him, but when he looked up Van Dorn's eyes would move away like disturbed flies. Lane experienced the horror of sitting face to face with a man whose mind had passed over the border.

"I'm going on leave day after tomorrow," the agent announced suddenly.

"I believe I can manage the factory for a while," Lane replied.

The Dutchman's teeth glimmered in one of his rare smiles.

"I'm going to clear up various matters before I go, attend to important things so there will be no need for you to read my correspondence!"

A thunderbolt falling at Lane's feet would not have left him more aghast. His actions with regard to the black-bordered letter had been reported to Van Dorn, by a paid spy no doubt, a native watcher. Van Dorn must realize that he was suspected of murder. He would never let his assistant escape with that knowledge. His last hope now lay in Busto, and he waited, suddenly fearful that the native, overcome by fright, might have gone back on his bargain. He even called himself to task for having paid him in advance.

The whistling notes, coming as they did through the splashing on the roof breathed of melancholia, were as mournful as the hoot of an owl. Contrary to Lane's expectation the Dutchman did not appear frightened. He waited calmly until the last falsetto had died. Then without looking at Lane he spoke in tones that were metallic in their cold restraint.

"Some one is having his—little joke."

He rose and went into his room and came out in a few seconds with a long barreled automatic in his hand. His face was set, the lines from nose and chin as firm as if chiseled of stone. As he verified the loading of the weapon he gave an impression of ruthless power, formidable strength, vaguely inhuman.

"What are you going to do?" Lane breathed.

"Find out who is the yoker."

With a sudden desperate terror Lane sprang for the agent, his thought being to get the automatic at all costs. With the precision of a machine Van Dorn grasped him by the shirt front, pulled him close, looked at him for an instant—and then hurled him backward. Stunned, Lane lay where he fell, even though he heard shots from the veranda, knew that Van Dorn was firing into the darkness.

Silence. Then the door opened close at his side. The streams of rain glistened like silver in the illuminated area. From the dripping dark beyond the Dutchman emerged dragging Busto. The boy bled profusely from a wound in the shoulder. He fainted as Van Dorn dropped him on a chair. The frightened house-boys were sent for water and with deft fingers Van Dorn washed out the wound. The pain brought Busto to consciousness. The sight of blood on his chest turned the black face to a grayish hue. Things were reaching a climax. If Busto confessed then indeed the issue must squarely be met. Lane remembered

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having seen, in the zoo, a poisonous snake in a glass-fronted cage, staring at a mouse that ran in wild curves about the floor, trying to climb up the glass wall. Weak as he felt, he set his teeth with the grim determination to put up a fight if the Dutchman resorted to physical force, and if time were given him to make some attempt at escape. Once at Tiassale, the first town with white men, he would be safe.

"I no do it—I no do it!" Busto denied, and the truthful look in his rolling eyes puzzled Lane.

From outside came the sentimental strains of "Dear Little Rose," quavered and broke off at the second bar.

"I no do it, massa," Busto repeated.

The sound was weak, as that of a sick man. The gurgling of the water in the rain-pipe deminated the rattle on the roof. Van Dorn stepped to the sideboard and drank from the bottle of gin, in great gulps that swelled his thin throat. Then he turned to Lane.

"You heard it, too?"

Lane could only nod. The whistling grew fainter, seemed to be receding into the bush, to be drowned out at last by the rain. Van Dorn came and sat by the table—lighted a cigaret. A smile played around his lips, more like the grin of a skull. His cheeks were as white as ashes. His expression, however, became an usual—bland, mild.

"Get out!" he snapped to Busto, who got up and wabbled weakly away.

Then with a wave of the hand he indicated the meats on the table.

"Trifling episode—shouldn't interfere with one's appetite."

He served himself with a large helping of canned sausage and chicken. Lane sat down at the table and followed his example. Each tried to swallow the food. The ominous silence again wrapped them in a mantle. Suddenly Van Dorn dropped his knife and fork and turned his head as if listening.

"There it is again," he muttered.

Lane could hear nothing.

For a moment the Dutchman played with a dish in front of him, then threw it to the floor.

"I'll get that —— yoker!" he muttered, and slammed his chair back from the table.

He made for his room, came back with cartridges which he fitted into the magazine of his automatic with shaking fingers.

"I'll get that —— yoker!" he repeated between his teeth, and went out into the night.

Still Lane could hear nothing.

Lane listened until the sound of his footsteps, crunching on the wet vegetation, had dwindled away over the compound. Free from Van Dorn's presence, his mind began to work feverishly. He would not wait here passively for the Dutchman's pleasure. He would have a fighting chance in the bush if he had a gun and there were guns in the agent's room. His indecision dispelled, he started on the search. But the gun-case was locked and would not yield to his pocket-knife. The brass padlock seemed to mock him, to smile in derision.

Faintly, from the direction of the river came a shot. The Dutchman was still amuck. Lane could picture him, hatless, in pajamas, soaked by the rain, insane with terror, a dangerous beast indeed to have loose.

Then came the whistling again. This time with a strangely immaterial quality as if not produced by a concrete agency. Intangible in its tenuous thread, the notes broke, as always, on the second bar. The sound was weak as that of a sick man. But why should a sick man whistle? The weird, whisper-like tone was ghost-like. Yes, that was the word—ghost-like! Lane felt the cold dread of the unknown, possibilities that do not cause the body to shrink from physical fear, but make the mind reel in an effort to understand. He looked through the window but could see nothing but the steadily falling drops glinting one by one as they passed through the light from within.

From the bottle of brandy left on the table he drank, in long swallows. The fiery spirits permeated his whole body with a velvety warmth. Still he could not understand.

"THE beggar will hurt some one!" The voice came from directly behind him, the voice of a white man, and not Van Dorn. There were no live white men for fifty miles. Suppose he turned to find that the drawling remark came from out of the atmosphere, to see nothing but the open door and the raindrops outside!

"I say, old man——"

Lane swung around.

The man stood just within the doorway,

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leaning on the wall, clad in an old pith helmet and a glistening rain-coat. He was thoroughly wet and dripped so profusely that he appeared to be the very embodiment of the rain. His eyes, keen blue and vivacious, peered out of a tangle of beard and mustache, sickly blond in tinge.

"May I have a bit of a drink?"

The lips parted in a smile, but there was longing in the tone.

Lane suddenly became aware that the fellow was on the verge of collapse. Speechless he handed him the brandy bottle which was immediately tilted to a high angle. The little man's throat worked in convulsive spasms as the liquid ran down. Presently he lowered the container and shook it.

"The bally stuff's all gone," he remarked casually.

Lane found his voice.

"Who in —— are you!"

"Reginald Irving Brill. R. I. B. Friends call me Eve—funny, eh?" Brill gave a low chuckle.

"Brill? Brill's dead——"

"A mere rumor—" The smile again. "There's no time to lose. Have you a gun?"

"There's a case of them in there—locked."

Brill pulled out a bunch of keys and made for the door. The lock surrendered without protest and the lid swung back revealing three guns laid in holders, the barrels blue steel, the stocks dark, the most pleasant sight Lane had seen for many a day.

"My guns!" Brill muttered, as he picked out a forty-four caliber rifle for himself and gave Lane a shotgun.

He was not long in finding the cartridges and tearing the wrappers off. The big shells he handed to the assistant, the soft-nosed bullets went into his own pocket. Lane watched him in a stupor. Yes, the reappearance of the supposedly dead man was in keeping with the madness of the whole scheme of Hell's-Half-Way House.

"Get a coat on," Brill snapped out, revived by the brandy.

Lane donned his poncho and helmet and followed Brill, who led the way through the compound with sure-footed strides. He seemed to see through the black void whipped by the rain.

"Pardon me for rushing you," he explained. "I didn't want that cobra to drop in on us. He's too good a shot."

He dropped back beside him.

"I suppose you know Van Dorn is not the peaceful Hollander——"

"He poisoned Merrit!"

"And pushed me into the river. He's money-mad — will do anything for a shilling."

A shot, muffled by the cloak of rain, echoed under the tall trees that rose on either side of the trail, dimly discernible against the overcast sky.

"Thanks," mumbled Brill, as he shifted toward the sound.

Lane followed confidently. Brill evidently knew what he was about.

"I went fishing with him," Brill resumed, holding out a hand to steady the assistant who had stumbled over a tangled root. "The beggar liked my diamond ring—often borrowed it—just to wear—childish—he asked me for it—I handed it over—he shoved me in——"

He broke off.

"But let's find out where he is." He stopped and whistled.

A shot answered immediately.

"Thanks," Brill acknowledged.

Another change of direction brought them among bushes adorned with little spikes as tough as wire nails, which caught in their clothing as they passed. The wet foliage from higher clumps brushed against Lane's cheek. He followed Brill into another trail.

"I swim," Brill resumed. "When I rose the beggar shot at me. The cliffs overhang on the factory side. I made for the bank there and hid. He waited a long time. I could hear him breathe, then he left. I made for the far shore—made heavy weather—all in—the brute had winged me. Chief Atche picked me up—Van Dorn had tricked him in a deal—he'd seen the whole show. Then I had fever—broken arm wouldn't set at first, native doctor—native food—rotten diet for a convalescent—took me months to get quite on my feet— Only been walking much about a week—came over—found you——"

They had reached the edge of the bush, and a tall bluff covered with high grass and scrubby bushes. Brill threw himself down beside a large mahogany-tree. Lane followed suit. The soil was wet, the air thick with the scent of drenched leaves. The rain ceased suddenly and all was quiet save for the dripping. When Lane spoke it was in a whisper.

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"What are we going to do?"

"Wait for him. Quite often he comes to that open space out there."

He indicated with a gesture.

"It's directly over the bank where I hid. Murderer to the scene of his crime, sort of thing."

"Are you going to plug him?"

"No, we must respect the law—" Brill grinned. "This is a French Colony. We can prove everything—then, guillotine——"

Lane shuddered at the early morning picture—the two long red shafts standing with the blade in readiness.

"Why not shoot the poor ——!"

"No," Brill answered shortly.

The clouds were shifting now and light came down outlining the trees in fantastic lace-work against the horizon.

"I'll whistle until he stops firing, then we can get him easy."

"He's a strong ——," Lane warned.

"I know."

Brill whistled softly. Shots rattled close at hand. A bullet thudded into a tree. Then silence. Again Brill whistled. Nothing.

The little man got up calmly.

"No more cartridges. Come on."

Lane was nervous and envied him his coolness. Before they had gone a half a dozen steps Van Dorn appeared. His white clothing made a perfect target as he moved swiftly forward to the very edge of the bluff where he stood, staring down into the dark below.

"Eh, Van Dorn!" Brill shouted.

Van Dorn turned.

"Who are you?" he asked, his voice steady, relieved no doubt to face a living man.

"I'm Brill."

"Brill's dead!"

"A mere rumor——"

The Dutchman disappeared. From far below came the splash of a body striking water. The two men ran to the cliff and looked over. They saw nothing, heard nothing.

"The beggar can't swim," Brill declared simply.

"Good," Lane nodded approvingly.

IN THE rainy season the water still gurgles in the drain-pipes of the Midway Factory. The place is peaceful now. Lane has stepped into Van Dorn's shoes and is fast growing to affluence on the five per cent. commission.

His assistant wears no coat and collar at dinner.

WHEN TECUMSEH WAS JEALOUS

by Hugh Pendexter

MOST readers are familiar with *Leatherstocking;* but how many ever heard of Leatherlips? And yet Leatherlips, as chief of the Wyandots, Sandusky tribe, was one of the signers of the Greenville, Ohio, treaty in 1795, after the battle of Fallen Timbers, and was so strong a character as to arouse the jealousy of the great Tecumseh and incur the death penalty.

Leatherlips' friendship for the whites was commonly known. None doubted his uprightness in all his dealings with both red and white men. The great Tecumseh, mad with jealousy, ordered him to be killed, declaring him to be a wizard.

Leatherlips' Indian name was Shatei-aronhia—"Two Clouds of Equal Size," according to Hewett's translation. But Tecumseh objected to any Indian bulking his size, and he directed Roundhead, a Wyandot chief, to act as the executioner.

From his brother Leatherlips received a piece of bark containing a drawing of a war-ax. When Leatherlips received the piece of bark he knew his fate was sealed.

There is nothing to show he could not have made his escape, but obviously he did not. One Summer day in 1810, at his camp on the Scioto, a dozen miles or so above Columbus, he had his grave dug and kneeled beside it and was slain while singing his death-song. Several white men were present at the execution and endeavored to save the chief's life.

The white man's memorial to this chief is a shaft of granite, erected by the Wyandot Club of Columbus in 1888 on the spot where he died.

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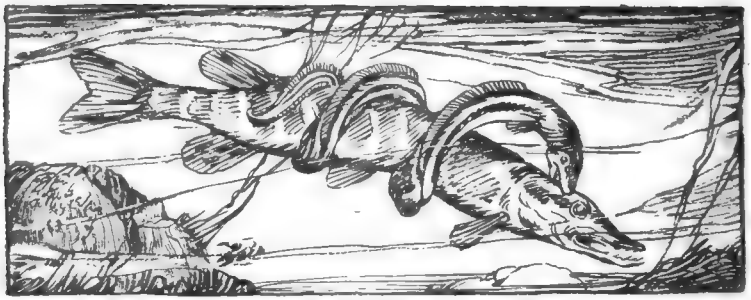

QUEEN of the POND

by F. ST. MARS

Author of "Rough Justice," "Handsome Is," etc.

ON THE bosom of the great Atlantic, where the water is so deep that the highest mountain would barely show above its surface if placed at the bottom, a little sooty-colored bird known as a stormy petrel was half-flying, half-paddling over the waves. As it went it fed, scooping up minute forms of life. As it went, too, it came on a piece of bread thrown over from some liner; and the bird, snatching it up, passed on.

It did not notice the tiny, tiny little splash that followed, as if something had fallen from the bread, or, if it did, saw nothing to make the splash. Indeed there was nothing to be seen, but there was something there, all the same.

Swimming rapidly away eastward along the surface was a creature. One can not rightly call it a fish, and it was not a reptile. It was just a creature. It looked as much as anything like a very thin piece of glass come to life and floating vertically. It was quite transparent, and somewhat thin—about a thickness of a sheet of ordinary magazine paper in fact. It had a head, and presumably some kind of brain power, though it was an absurdly small head.

Now, that little creature had been used to living very far down in the deep water, where it may just be possible that the enormous pressure exerted by the water there had something to do with the amazing shape. Be that as it may, it was a young creature, a baby creature, and growing fast.

At least, it had been growing. Only ten minutes before, however, it had come to the surface for the first time in its life, because it had suddenly felt a strange and irresistible impulse to swim eastward. Perhaps some one else can explain how it knew which way to swim. I can not. But it did know. No one could doubt this had he been able to watch its invisible self pegging away toward the rising sun.

So it swam for hours and hours, and for days and days, sometimes under the water, sometimes on or near the surface, but never again did it go down to the enormous depths that had been its home before. It had done with the vast depths for ever except once, and that once was far, far distant in its life.

These matters being so, this creature of strange ways began, as the days went by, to change its shape. There was apparently no further need for the paper-thickness form of body. Therefore it commenced slowly to discard that and grow gradually rounder.

But that was not wonder enough. More was to come. It began to grow smaller—really and actually smaller.

And so it swam its perilous way across the trackless ocean, encountering and slipping out of numberless dangers—including a lightning dash through a cod's open mouth, a miraculous wriggle from the tentacles of a—to us—small cuttlefish, and a furious churning in the frothing wake of a twenty-two-thousand-ton liner, till at last we might have discovered her—for it turned out to be a female—one fine windy morning, working

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slowly up the English Channel from the Atlantic Ocean.

By this time no one would have been able to recognize her at all as the glassy, paper-thick creature of the abysmal depths. She was now a thin, long shape, still transparent as glass in all save a threadlike, dark line running down her entire length inside. Two fins she had, and from nose to tip of tail boasted a length of four and a half inches.

She was not alone now, and by the same token—being also no longer invisible—her danger became legion. Everywhere she looked in the green world of the sea she could discern other shapes exactly the counterpart of herself save in length, all swimming steadily eastward.

Now and then indeed some—hundreds of thousands—turned off northward toward the near-by shore of England, but that seemed to make no difference to the never ending swarms that bore her company; they came in shoals, and in shoals of shoals, all heading up-channel from the broad Atlantic.

Nor was she alone in another respect. Did she dive, darting fish—dogfish and others—hanging on the heels of the shoals as wolves on the outskirts of the bison herds, rushed open-jawed upon her. Did she flash like lightning to the surface, there were eternally sweeping to and fro the ominous shadows of waiting seagulls, following the shoals also.

In fact, her life for the next day or so was one unending hairbreadth escape, one ceaseless twisting, wriggling, squirming, rushing series of darts from multitudinous foes that seemed to spring up out of nowhere as the shoals came by.

By this time she had attained the dignity of an English name of her own, this atom. Till then she had only been some kind of *leptocephalus*,* but she was now a full-blown elver, which is a baby eel, and a creature already possessing that questionable honor known as being of marketable value. And she was very soon to know it, too.

Next morning a strange thing happened to the elver. She suddenly ceased from swimming eastward, and, swinging round, pointed her sharp little nose due north. Some hundreds of thousands of her companions—many of which may even have been her own brothers and sisters—did the same thing, with the same result, that they very soon found themselves heading up a broad and muddy estuary.

They must have known that the estuary would be there, since they had journeyed from so far to find it, but how they knew, whether by instinct or by some force of currents and taint of mud in the sea, is a puzzle. They knew anyhow.

IF THE open sea was dangerous, however, the elver soon found that the estuary was enough to give one nightmare. She had just avoided the swoop of a gull, had just started a moment later out of the jaws of a bass, when a shadow fell on the top of the water—a very big shadow, which moved.

She knew it for a boat, but took little notice. Boats had never hunted her before; and anyway, in spite of the fact that she must have only been one among millions of elvers swimming up that estuary at that moment, she had her work cut out to cheat the gulls, herons, cormorants, fish and crabs. Next moment she passed by a wall, so close that her tail touched it, and indeed it was for a moment just a toss-up which side of it she should go. She chose the right side—the right side in two senses, for a good few thousand of her friends chose the left side.

She never saw those friends again.

In a few seconds the wall began to move upward, and went from her sight. In the space which it had occupied was left water, of course, but no elvers, though there were elvers everywhere else. The thing had been a kind of huge trap arrangement let down from the boat.

I don't know how many pounds' weight of elvers that precise boat captured that day, but I can tell you this, so that you may judge a little as to the number of elvers in that estuary alone. About one ton of elvers was taken on that day; and it takes about seventy thousand elvers to turn the scale at the five-pound weight.

The elver was not lonely.

Hour after hour the elver swam on up the estuary, till all of a sudden she felt the water going by hard, like a gale in the teeth. Crowds of crabs hurried by, and shoals of fish. The paddling feet of the flocks of swimming seagulls above began strangely to begin to lower themselves down, down, down.

*Narrow-headed.

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The tide was going out.

All the estuary folk know what to do when the ride runs out—get to deep water, reach the main channel and do it quick. Wo betide him who is stranded on the miles and miles of mud-flats after the tide has gone!

The elver knew this. She made for deep water, and got there only just in time. In fact, she actually had to roll down the steep bank of the main channel in the open air, so swiftly does the tide leave the flats. Millions of her kind must have been left up above, to be captured in the shallow mud-pools.

Not for one moment did the elver cease her steady course up-stream, however. The narrow escape disconcerted her not at all. The desire to go up-stream, which drove her on, was far too strong to let a mere matter of life and death count.

On she went, on, on, on, till at last, just before night, the taste of the water began to change. The salt, in fact, began to fade out of it. They were getting so far up the river indeed that the tide and the salt water had nearly faded out.

A good many of the smaller elvers, the little things from two to three inches long, had been falling out all the time and turning aside to loiter along the banks. Now, however, as the water changed from salt to fresh, all these smaller ones turned back, leaving only the larger ones to go on up-stream alone.

Why was this? The smaller ones, which turned back, were males; they are rarely found quite out of touch of salt water. Their lives are lived in the estuaries. The ones that went on were females all. They, for most of their lives, live only in fresh water—all the time they are growing, in fact.

Night came down, and the moon shone forth. The elver shifted to the shallows along the bank, where worms, drowned mosquitoes, caddie-flies, etc., were waiting to be eaten. Suddenly in front of her she saw two thin posts, and they moved. They—or one of them, to be correct—shifted only fractionally, but it was enough. Quicker than one could see she darted away, and almost more quickly than one could see something spearlike shot down and struck the mud exactly where the elver had been. It was the beak of a heron, and the posts were the heron's legs.

All night the elver and her friends swam onward. She came to a lock, and the lock was closed; but it could not stop her and her companions. She swarmed up the slippery sides—swarmed up the sides, and over the top into the river again, at the hundred and twenty-first try, after the hundred and twentieth fall. No one can tell precisely how she accomplished this wonderful feat.

She seemed to be able to worm her body into every tiny cranny of the wood, to hook in on every fractional ledge; and perhaps her fins and indeed even her scales in a minute way may have helped.

Three months later the elver was far up that river, in a little stream that ran into it. She was now really no longer an elver, but a real eel. You could see her. She did not look like a black line.

She was swimming still against the stream, killing and eating all she could that came in her way, and nearly getting killed herself pretty often.

After a time she left the stream and turned up a tiny rill that was really no more than the drainage from several fields. Shallower and shallower grew the water, till at last she found herself in nothing more than a hedgeside ditch with water in it; but still she kept on.

At last her way was altogether barred by a gateway. She stopped, dug herself down into the mud and waited till night came. Then she wriggled out and went straight away toward a grass field. It was a perilous voyage, and a strange one for a fish, but she accomplished it safely and arrived at length on the far side, where was a very large pond, almost like a lake, some acres in extent, and surrounded by trees. And here she stayed.

Her journey was accomplished. She had set out to reach this place when the stormy petrel dropped her from under the piece of bread far out in the Atlantic.

Six years passed away with the eel still in the big pond. She was much changed, however, being now about four feet long. She was by then "Queen of the Pond," and a very terrible queen, too. Gradually as she grew she had conquered all the denizens of the place till at last when full grown she had stolen up behind the dreaded pike himself, who was their king, and sprung upon him, and, wrapping her lithe coils about him, had buried her teeth in his head, so that he died. All paid toll to her, from worms, fish and insects up to ducklings and

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even moorhens. She devoured them all.

Mostly she had lived a very inactive life, buried under the mud for the main part—where, by the way, she had been once frozen hard—but on this particular evening she was very restless, swimming round and round the pond. And when day dawned again she was gone. She had returned straight to the sea by the way she had come, straight back to the depths, taking with her a nice silvery mate, found in the estuary and about twenty inches long, which is big for a male eel.

She slew him later, and learned—not for the first time probably—what eel tastes like. And then—well, far out in the Atlantic, deep, deep down, she laid her little "clutch" of eggs—not more than about seven million—and died.

Her destiny was fulfilled.

WHITE DEVIL *of the* BLACK HILLS

by THOMAS HARVEY GILL

A TWIG snapped. Silhouetted against a cloud-banked sky the white wolf paused and looked down. Through the deepening purple of twilight, across a narrow plain, the lights of Custer gleamed. A train whistled; the head lights of an automobile flared and disappeared. Men-things. The wolf's glittering eyes fixed for an instant like a brooding spirit of evil.

From above a soft whine floated and a shadowy form joined him; nosed his shoulder in a brief caress. The newcomer was smaller, more graceful and of far less powerful build, the fur a shade darker than the snow white pelt of her mate. Shoulder to shoulder they stood gazing down into the valley where men and man's devices were abroad. Back in the ravine a coyote howled, then silence. The night wind crept up the hillside, evoking a hushed moan among the pines, rippling the long hair on the backs of the motionless statues. The white wolf sniffed the air. Some occult message reached him, bidding him come. He turned abruptly and, followed by his mate, passed silently down the mountainside.

For an hour they threaded their way in single file beneath the stars. Twice the leader stopped and tested the wind. At the lower edge of the pines they turned north, leaped a fence and trotted noiselessly through a pasture in which the close-cropped grass was yellowing before the coming of Autumn. Somewhere in the blackness ahead a bell tinkled.

At a stealthy walk the white and gray shadows approached until the outlines of cattle grew dimly visible. Fore-foot poised, the leader looked back, and obediently the mate dropped to the ground. The kill was to be his, tonight. Her part to lie quietly on guard, and afterward to feast.

The wind, scarcely stirring, carried no warning to the quarry as they lay drowsily munching the evening cud. Deliberately, step by step, the wolf advanced. Then the wind veered, bringing to the bell-cow's nostrils with appalling nearness the

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dreaded wolf scent—the blood smell of killers. Snorting, she lunged to her feet, followed with a clatter of hoofs by the terrified herd.

As they swept past, the wolf, running easily, head up, fangs bared, chose from among them a two-year heifer and like lightning struck. A frenzied steer swung between them. A snarl, a slashing rip, and the steer fell gasping. The herd rushed on, panic-crazed. A dozen leaps, and again the wolf closed, struck again, and the doomed heifer lunged to her knees with a torn jugular vein. Heads down, the herd pounded into the darkness.

Squatting on his haunches, the killer whined, and in response the gray mate rose and, trotting past the quivering steer without a glance, joined her lord. So they feasted, leisurely taking toll of the stupid men-things and of the stupid beasts that served them. At intervals the leader stopped and listened. The silence was unbroken.

Replete at last, the killer raised his bloody head and drew the night air deep into his lungs. Good hunting! He stretched, curving his powerful neck until the giant shoulder-muscles bunched and rippled beneath the sleek fur. The little mate looked up admiringly. Good hunting surely!

IN THE town of Custer, at the Forest Service office, the ranchers of the southern hills were gathered. Tanned by sun and wind, clear-eyed and silent, they stood about the room or squatted, cowboy-fashion, on the high heels of their riding-boots. Goodson, the forest ranger, was speaking.

"Oh, we can talk till we're hoarse, but we won't get 'em. Holdin' meetings won't get 'em. I've trapped through these Black Hills for thirty years, and I'm no kid at the game. Sorta cut my eye-teeth and think I savvy wolves, you might say. Also I suggests I never claimed a monopoly on this wolfin' job. I'm licked and I know it." He looked about him defiantly. "Has anybody any suggestions as to how I might of done better?"

None volunteered.

"I tell you this," he went on, "I've scattered poisoned bait until half the dogs around the Hills are dead. I've set traps until I got to keep a card index to tell me where they're cached. I've hit the trail early and late hoping for a lucky shot. I've trailed 'em until I can see wolf-tracks in my sleep, and I'm here to state that there ain't a man in this country that can get 'em."

"How about 'One Eye,' the Sioux?" asked a voice. "He admits that he's sure bad medicine on wolves and coyotes."

Goodson, rolling a cigaret, paused.

"I went to One Eye six months ago. Told him there was five hundred iron men on the white wolf's head. Maybe I added that you boys would throw in enough moonshine to pickle his red heart. The old cigar sign didn't even look up. Sucks his pipe and gives me to understand that we was chasin' devils—spirit curse, he calls 'em."

Goodson spat, lighted the cigaret and sat down.

A young rancher, loser of four-pure-bred cows the week before, laughed bitterly.

"I'll grant the curse freely. In the three years these wolves have been here they have killed well over two hundred thousand dollars worth of cattle and sheep. 'Spirit curse,' eh? I know where that comes from. My dad used to tell of an Indian legend that promised some day Manitou the Great would send a curse of wolves into the Black Hills to drive out the white intruder and give back to the red man his happy hunting grounds."

He looked at Goodson, smiling.

"You're not laying down on the off chance that you're chasing spooks, are you, Goodson? This white devil, as you call him—well, he's an ordinary wolf and can be caught like an ordinary wolf."

Goodson surveyed the speaker with cold contempt.

"You ain't been outa college long enough to get over it, have you, son? Such remarks makes me sicker'n horsemeat. I'd a —— sight rather believe that critter was a spirit than an ordinary wolf. If I remember right, you spent over a month with some of your dude friends trying to get this ordinary wolf. Brought some imported Prussian wolf-hounds guaranteed to clean up a herd of wolves before breakfast. And the little birdies say that three of those pedigreed dreadnaughts was converted into a Dutch lunch one evening by those ordinary wolves."

Goodson turned to the others.

"Does an ordinary wolf walk logs to

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hide his trail like a mountain lion? Not a man here has ever heard of one doin' it. Well, this one does. Do ordinary wolves back-trail like deer and double around until you don't know where in —— you're at? Ever seen ordinary wolves scratch dirt on traps and spring 'em by dropping rocks on the pan? Well, by the Lord, this one does. Listen. Last month I finds a cañon that these two beasts had been usin' every night to come down off the mountain. In one place it was too narrow for a man to walk through and too steep to go back up. I thinks now I got both of 'em, and I sets three traps far enough apart so that if they jumps the first they land in the second. Real clever stuff." Goodson gave a short laugh. "Next morning I gets there early equipped with a skinning-knife—which I didn't need.

"The tracks told the story. They had come down the ravine as usual, the white wolf in the lead and his mate close behind. When the White Devil got to the first trap he stopped. All those traps, remember, were well covered with brush and dirt, and I'd used gloves to handle 'em. Somethin', you can call it instinct if you want, told him not to go on. Rearin' on his hind feet he tries to go back. The mate doesn't move. The leader finds it too steep to make back up, like I'd thought. He stands awhile. Maybe, bein' an ordinary wolf, he was admiring the scenery. Then again, maybe he was figgurin'. Anyhow, he kicks out some loose rocks and rolls 'em at the first trap. It takes maybe a dozen tries and a rock finally hits the pan and snaps the trap. The wolf walks over it and goes to the next. Springs it the same way. The third trap he just jumps over. That's what hit me—he knew that third trap was the last. That night they celebrates by killing a yearling steer of Cameron's, and they've never used the ravine since. Ordinary wolf. I'm telling you that white critter has the courage of a grizzly, the wisdom of a coyote, and the luck of a drunken sailor."

No man among them disputed the statement, for Goodson had spent more than a year in pursuit of these costly guests of the Black Hills ranchers. He had been bested in this deadly game of hide and seek, as dozens of hunters had, and none was so fit to pass judgment on the cunning of these marauders.

Cameron, owner of the Bar 4 outfit, broke the silence.

"Goodson's given up, boys, and it comes to this: Either we get the wolves or we stockmen might as well go into the fertilizer business. If Goodson can't get them, who can?"

Bonner, the forest supervisor, was the first to speak after the long baffled pause that followed.

"One man, if we can get him. Wolf-hunter. Saw him once in Wyoming on the Shoshone. Killed over a thousand wolves in his time. Lord knows how many coyotes."

Bonner had a way of speaking in impatient jerks and pausing often for breath—the memento of a running fight with a cattle-rustler in which Bonner had come out second best. He added—

"Name's Loup."

At the last word, Gaspar, the French-Canadian, bounded to his feet.

"Loup; you say Loup, *m'sieur?*"

Bonner nodded. The Canadian crossed himself.

"*Loup le sauvage, eh, mon dieu,*" he turned an ashy face toward Bonner, "but better far the wolves. They tell strange tales of Loup beyond the Bay. Better, I say, the wolves that we know of than this Loup that no one knows."

Through a haze of smoke the men leaned forward curiously.

"What's bit you?" asked Cameron. "Those wolves pets of yours?"

"YOU think I am one fool? *Eh bien*, you may. I hear many times of this Loup. I tell a tale *les habitants* know in my north country. They say, where Loup he come from no man knows. Some say he is born of Indian mother and Canadian father. Some say a trapper find him in the den of a she wolf. The trapper, he shoot the wolf and take Loup home, but never know his parents. Years pass, and Loup grow to be strong man, but often in the moonlight men say he run with the pack and that once he fight with the leader and kill him with bare hands. Then Loup fall in love with half-breed girl and they make to marry, but the priest he denounce Loup, saying he has sold his soul. And that night—I tell the tale as it runs—the pack seek out this girl that is to be Loup's bride. All that remain

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of her, Loup find when day come, and in revenge he turn hunter and kill those friends of yesterday.

"More and more he kill—men say sometime he kill with hands alone and crush them as a field mouse is crushed—so."

The Canadian stretched forth his open hand and closed it slowly.

"So. I have myself seen a wolf that Loup had killed, and there was no bullet-hole. And at night when wolf-pack cries back in my country, men say, 'Loup gathers his soldiers.' Myself, I think he has sold his soul to the evil one and knows things no one knows. Men say great sorrow comes when Loup comes, death and misfortune; and I, Gaspar, say let us have none of this Loup."

He made a wide gesture and sat down.

Cameron, catching Bonner's eye, winked.

"Sweet thought—spirit-wolf and devil-man. Looks like we may have quite a menagerie. Kind of two-ringed Black Hills circus."

Then Cameron's face grew serious.

"What's this fellow Loup's method? I mean, when he's not running them down and chewin' their ears off."

"Tracks and shoots," Bonner answered. "Seldom uses a trap—just follows along—gets a running chance and shoots. Dead critter. Seen him shoot from a galloping horse at coyotes. Seldom talks, never smiles. Good man."

"Where is he now?"

"Cody, last I heard. Hutton, supervisor there. He'll know."

Cameron rose and buckled on his spurs.

"It's a last chance. —— Gaspar's fairy tales; let's get him! I'll pay his expenses and board him at the ranch. When'll you write?"

Bonner pulled out a telegram form.

"Now," he replied.

The week that followed was profitable for the marauders and correspondingly costly to the stockmen. Twenty miles south of Custer the wolves broke into a corral and slaughtered, in fiendish revelry, half a hundred sheep and lambs. The next morning Bonner received a telegram.

Loup on way.—HUTTON.

On Spring Creek, the following night, two steers were killed close to a ranch-house and in the morning Cameron's rider cursed in the frosty sunrise as he came upon the mangled bodies of three full-grown milch cows. Light snow had fallen, and the tale was written on the glittering cover.

The white leader had killed with his usual throat-hold, springing from beside his prey, fastening keen fangs in the jugular vein and pulling the frenzied animals to earth. Then he and his mate had dined fastidiously, tearing a few mouthfuls from the saddle of the fattest cows.

Four coyotes had followed, drawn by the fresh scent of blood. Skulking in the timber, they waited until the lords of the hills had feasted; then, on their departure, had crept forward and gorged until dawn.

From his pocket the rider pulled a dozen strychnin capsules and hid them in the flesh of the carcasses. "Not that you'll ever come back, you —— bloody killers, but I may get a thievin' coyote or two."

Remounting his horse, he eyed the stained, trampled snow.

"Over a hundred dollars worth of cow flesh," he muttered, "and maybe it's only part of your night's work. Good God!—" he pounded in ineffectual fury upon the saddle-horn—"can't nobody get you?"

In the purple distance the howl of a coyote mocked him.

THE following night Bonner sat late in his office, signing mail to the Denver office. On his table lay a telegram ordering him to Albuquerque for the Winter. Outside the late Autumn twilight fell; the shadows of Harney Peak deepened, blending into mysterious dusk of Western night. A north-bound train whistled, stopped with a shriek of brakes, then rumbled northward into the night, spraying forth a glittering comet of sparks as it sped for the upgrade toward Deadwood.

Bonner switched on the light and continued writing.

The door opened admitting a blast of night wind, and Bonner looked up to see a tall figure framed in the doorway. The man advanced and stood towering above Bonner's desk. He looked not at Bonner but through the window toward the veiled gleam of the mountains. The eyes had the blue hardness of a polished gun-barrel. There came to Bonner's mind the same sense of fatality that he had felt when first he saw this killer of a thousand wolves. The same undefined, uncanny sense of mystery. He seemed a thing apart—this

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man about whom legend had weaved strange tales.

"Friendly and sociable as Mt. Hood and as easily approached," Bonner had said of him.

"I'm Loup, the wolfer." His voice was deep but guttural as that of one who dealt not overmuch in speech.

"Knew you in Cody, two years ago," Bonner began.

Loup nodded shortly.

"Who do I stay with here?"

"Man named Cameron. He's at the hotel now. You'd better——"

The door closed and Bonner was alone, pen still poised above his letter.

"Well, by ——," he observed, "sure a touching reunion. Never looked at me; never seemed to move. Just kind of oozed up to the desk and out again."

It seemed to have grown colder in the office. Mechanically, Bonner resumed his writing:

THEN began a duel more strange, more doggedly fought than even the pioneer west had ever known. During the three years the White Devil had ravaged the herds of the stockmen and defied them, his fame had spread from the prairies to the Pacific. Bounty-hunters from the Rockies, sportsmen from the East, wolfers from Canada took up his taunting challenge and lost. Few men had ever seen him, but his bloody handiwork lay heavy upon the land.

And of Loup vague tales had come down from the north that were told and retold about many flickering camp-fires. Vague tales, for no one knew whence he came, and no one looking into his brooding, distant eyes cared to ask him.

On the third day after Loup's coming, he found fresh tracks, but like intangible spirits the wolves evaded him, and on the granite shoulder of Harney Peak he lost their trail. A week later he came upon a fresh kill and back-tracked the wolves to their den. For a day and a night he lay waiting, but they never came. He resumed tracking again.

Days passed. The aspen leaves turned yellow and fell. Winter waited impatiently, eager to hurl its mantle over plain and mountain-peak. Loup redoubled his efforts to come to grips with the marauders before the snow closed in. Three times he picked up fresh tracks, made not over an hour before, but not once did he catch sight of his quarry.

The wolves, harried by the inexorable pursuit, ranged wider but raided as savagely as before. For days on end no depredations would occur and men would say, "Perhaps, they are gone," but a fresh carcass would bear mute testimony that their hopes were vain.

As the cattle drifted closer to the ranches food became scarce. Light snows aided the hunter in tracking. The killers were driven to choose new trails, new dens. Fearing to make an open kill, the marauders dug at times for field mice or scratched at rotten stumps for grubs.

Loup, in Cameron's words, was "keeping them on the move." Yet always he lost them among the tumbled boulders that were strewn upon the upper reaches of Harney Peak. A dozen times he lay in ambush along the trail they had used the night before, but each time the leader scented him and circled.

Then Winter, long delayed, burst with arctic fury over the pine-clad hills, heaping valley and mountain-top with its white splendor. The wolves adopted new tactics, raiding only during storms that obliterated their trails and left no clue for Loup to follow.

Winter passed, and among the melting snow drifts the wind-flowers dotted the hills with the first promise of Spring. The White Devil had become gaunt with the inexorable chase. Loup himself was worn and trail-weary. So far the scales balanced; skill and cunning were matched equally, and luck, the deciding factor, still held aloof from the game.

IN EARLY May Bonner returned and the following evening rode to Cameron's ranch. Turning his pony up the lane, he passed row after row of coyote-hides drying on the corral fence. At the barn he dismounted and with the freedom of old friendship, unsaddled, fed his horse and entered the ranch-house. Cameron sat before the stove braiding a hackamore, and at his feet lay his one companion, Bum, the Airedale.

Bonner's first question was as abrupt as his entrance.

"Loup still with you?"

Cameron looked up with a wry smile.

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"That frolicsome playmate you sent me? Why, in his spare time he stays here. Most times he's out there."

He waved a hand toward the mountains.

"What luck's he had?"

"With the White Devil? None. —— on coyote though—see his string on the fence? But say, those wolves haven't made a raid within ten miles of here since Loup came. Don't mean nothin', perhaps; just kinda peculiar. They're killing south of here and north."

"How does Loup work?"

A baffled smile passed over Cameron's face. Leaning forward, he fondled the head of the sleeping dog.

"You'll sure have to ask Loup. Our conversation's been kind of sketchy. You remember, maybe, I drove him out here the night he came. He said about four words. Just sat beside me in the rig looking at the mountains and sniffing the air. After supper I showed him a dozen new wolf traps. Didn't seem interested. Asked him if he wanted some strychnin for poisoned bait.

" 'Not yet' he says.

" 'I'll show you the country in the morning,' I offers.

"He says, 'I can find my way.'

"An hour later, the silence havin' got as thick as glue, I tries again.

"I says, 'How do you like my shack?'

" 'Kinda noisy,' he responds socially, and I replies in honeyed tones, 'You may be a —— fine wolfer, but you're one —— of a dinner companion.' Whereupon I goes to bed.

"Next morning, when I got up, he'd gone. Took a couple chunks of beef and disappeared. When I came back that night there he sits outside the house, still as a monument, looking with those unblinking eyes of his at the hills. 'What's the use sitting out here,' I asks. It was freezing cold. 'Kind of stuffy in the house,' he says. Next day as I saddles up, I offers him two of my best saddle-horses. Loup shakes his head. 'I can make better time afoot. Horses are afraid of me.' He walks over to my pony, and, by ——, Bonner, that cayuse just quivered all over and edged away as far as the halter would let him. He's spooky, Bonner, and if it wasn't that I think his bein' here keeps those varmints away I'd sure suggest that he drag his freight. You never hear him move; you look up and he's beside you, always looking somewhere in the distance. Or a door creaks, and he's gone. Won't smoke, says it ruins his power of smell. Sometimes he's gone for two days with only a handful of grub, not even a blanket."

The dog that had been sleeping by Cameron's chair rose growling, and with a frightened whine slunk to the back of the house.

"Loup," whispered Cameron. "That's the joyful way the pup greets him."

The latch raised softly; the door opened a few inches and closed again. Loup, in Bonner's words, had oozed into the room.

"Any luck?" Bonner's voice had a forced heartiness.

Loup's head moved slightly in denial. For an instant his eyes seemed to whisk over Bonner's face.

"See any wolf-signs up Gold Creek?" he asked.

"Nary a sign. How did you know I was up Gold Creek; track me?"

"Got your scent from the divide."

Bonner pursed his lips in a silent whistle.

"Saturday night I take a couple Turkish baths."

Loup, busy with his rifle, returned:

"Everybody has a scent. Even a dog knows that."

For a space Bonner watched the hunter in silence, then asked—

"When you going to get the White Devil?"

Loup pulled a greased rag through the gun barrel.

"Before I leave."

The words were spoken quietly but with finality.

"That wolf," he added, "knows more than any wolf that ever lived—and most men. Mate isn't quite so keen. Probably get her within a week now."

"Certain?"

Loup's brooding eyes raised toward the mountains.

"Is anything certain out there?" he asked half to himself.

Filling the magazine and chamber of his rifle, he leaned it against the wall.

The dog that had been cowering in the farthest corner whined and looked eagerly at the door, his nose twitching.

Loup nodded.

"Thought so too," he muttered and passed to the window.

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Seizing his Savage, he cocked it and opened the door. On the threshold he leveled the rifle and fired, then glided out into the dusk. The Airedale, for a moment forgetting his fear, dashed after him and raced toward the road where a coyote lay crumpled in death.

"My ——," panted Bonner, as he joined the wolfer, "can you see in the dark too?"

Loup stopped and slung the coyote upon his shoulder.

"Can't you?" he asked.

Supper over, Loup pulled out the traps that Cameron had shown him on the night of his arrival. He tested the dozen critically and laid all but five aside.

"I'll use these tomorrow."

"What bait?"

"None. That's where Goodson lost out. My only chance is to place them lucky. Might as well tie a red flag to them as to bait 'em."

"Just going to put them out somewhere and pray to God that the White Devil steps inside," grunted Bonner.

Sensitive as an animal to ridicule, Loup's eyes narrowed, but he answered quietly.

"Something like that, except that after tracking those wolves eight months I may know where they go. I may have learned, for instance, that the she wolf leaves her mate every time the moon's full and goes down Rifle Cañon to a cave. Last full moon I lay in wait for her. She circled before going down, got my scent and went back. The White Devil don't go with her; if he did, a trap would be as useful as a pail of water. Compared to him she's got no more sense than your dog. If it wasn't for him, even one of you might have got her."

His voice trailed into silence, and as if regretting so many words or depressed with the closeness of the room he went out into the starlit night. An hour later, Cameron coming from the barn saw the tall, lonely figure standing at a corner of the fence, motionless in the moonlight; sunk in his own secret thoughts.

BEHIND the Needles the full moon rose, silvering the pines, glinting the granite ribs of the hills, riding majestically in the cloudless sky.

The White Devil's mate stirred uneasily. A hundred yards ahead the leader stopped and looked back. To-night she was not following closely. He scented the air which bore to him the warm fresh smell of cattle somewhere in the park below. He whined impatiently. Came an answering whine from above and, satisfied, he trotted toward the lower country. Obediently, she turned to follow, then stopped.

Vague as the urge of coming Spring, imperious as the famine call, came with the full moon this need to return down Rifle Cañon to the opening among the pines where a cave lay hidden among boulders. It may be she had forgotten that there, three years ago, she had borne her first litter to the white leader; that there in the evening she had watched three gray furry things roll and play. .

Many months had passed since then. Her young had grown and learned the laws of the hunt, the keen delight of the game scent, the fearsome scent of the dreaded thing called man. Then they had gone away, each answering the lure of distant hunting-grounds, following the mating-call, and had in time fallen to trap, poison or rifle.

Perhaps she had forgotten all this, but as each full moon rose high over the summit of Harney Peak she turned, and, leaving her mate to a lonely kill, hurried toward the head of the cañon. So tonight, but at the cañon's rim she swerved and, breaking to an easy lope, circled the sides, pausing and sniffing. The odor of the pine-trees and of the warm awakening earth reached her. No human taint disturbed the air. Impatiently she thrust man from her reckoning.

The moon was higher, and silent as a gray ghost—she trotted down the trail. One mile, two miles, passed beneath her hastening feet. Ahead, like a drop of silver, lay the open park she sought and at the further end the cave. The trail stretched narrow and straight before her. Twigs and pine needles cluttered the ground beneath her, forming a thick, soft mat for her feet.

Suddenly she stopped, ears forward, alert. Surely that low, vague mound of twigs had not been there before. Should she leave the trail? Caution urged her to turn, but on either side the young pines stood, close and thick. Time would be lost. What was there to fear? Impatiently she sniffed the jumbled twigs and needles. Nothing! And the old call came ever stronger. She leaped forward.

A click resounded between the cañon

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walls, loud as a rifle-shot in the still Spring night. Something caught her, something with cruel jaws that held her foot above the ankle, throwing her to the ground. Instantly, with a snarl of rage and fear, she was on her feet, tearing with impotent teeth at the cold steel. Turning, she backed as far as the biting vice would allow.

Another click, another blinding wave of pain and the little mate lay helplessly stretched with fore and hind foot imprisoned.

For a moment she lay inert, then nosed forward to sniff the glittering thing that held her. Faintly to her pain-sharpened nostrils came a smell, hardly perceptible but carrying its message of the man-thing that never slept or rested or went away. She was a prisoner.

She raised her head to give the help cry that would bring her unconquerable lord, but her jaws closed without a sound. A vague dread silenced her; a half-formed thought that she herself was not the object of their relentless hunt but only a means of bringing destruction to this swift, white god of hers. Silently, whimpering, afraid, the little wolf settled herself between those burning jaws of steel and waited.

Above on the cañon wall a shape as still and remorseless as death stalked among the dark shadows of the pines. It glided to the rim and looked cautiously down. A gun-barrel glittered in the moonlight. An eddy in the night air laden with the cursed scent told the captive that above the hunter waited. Numb with pain and fear, she lay fighting with herself for the courage to give no signal that might bring her mate.

Loup's eyes narrowed, then momentarily softened. A feeling not unakin to pity passed over him as he lay high up on the granite brow, for here in its wild, unutterable way, was loyalty and love. Love! At the thought the grimness returned, the hungry eyes narrowed.

From a ridge to the south, a long, interrogating cry floated, carrying to the little captive the search call of her mate. She rose with a groan of pain to her two unfettered feet. Hope blazed in her eyes. He was coming, this mate of hers; he who would tear to shreds these grinding knife-like vices.

Then, again, came the scent from above; she caught the play of moonlight on the gun-barrel as Loup leaned eagerly forward. A cry would bring her leader; a single cry. But above in the moonlight death was waiting. Slowly she sank with a moan. Doomed and captive, she would die alone.

From the west the call came, fainter and with a note of fear and pleading. Loup peered down. The gray, pitiful figure made no move. If he could make her call but once! Detaching a stone from the cañon wall, he flung it toward her. If fell not five feet away. She shivered and lowering her head waited, but gave no cry. From far off now came a faint last cry. Then silence. The White Devil had gone.

With glistening, triumphant eyes she looked aloft at the silent figure on the ledge now silhouetted against a reddening dawn that dimmed the moon and drove the stars away.

"I'm going to do a foolish thing," Loup muttered, "but you're just a little too good to suffer."

The rifle slowly rose. A crash filled the cañon with a million shattering echoes that lowered to spiteful whispers, then died. Below the little mate quivered and lay still.

A golden eagle, circling in the brightening sky, eyed curiously the tall, grim figure and beneath him the gray, crumpled thing that once had been the White Devil's mate.

Among the rock-strewn wastes of Harney Peak a shadow flitted beneath the stunted pines. Seeking, seeking, sniffing each wind that eddied up from below, pausing on each promontory to search with eager eyes, the white wolf hurried on his fruitless quest. Only when the warm noon sun blazed overhead did he cease and crawl beneath a ledge of rock to await the passing of day, the coming of night and the return of one whose days and nights were forever ended.

Loup had lost no time. Twice he made the trip from Cameron's ranch laden with traps. His only chance lay in foretelling the actions of the wolf. Most likely, he reasoned, the killer would go to where his mate had left him the night before, then follow her tracks down Rifle Cañon. Loup resisted a temptation to lie in wait at the head of the gorge—the wolf would get his scent. Traps would be better, a barrage of traps down the trail and a circle of them about the dead mate. As the moon rose Loup finished. He had concealed ten traps on the trail above. Six more he hid with infinite pains about the body of the she wolf.

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Drawing off his gloves, he glanced toward Harney Peak, where the light in the fire guard's cabin gleamed like a larger star.

"Come on, White Devil," he challenged, "it's time we sat in on another hand."

Cautiously he climbed out of the cañon and made his way to the deserted cabin of a tie-cutter a mile away.

THE White Devil had found the trail.

At the head of Rifle Cañon, he stopped, smelling a moment at the foot-print to which clung faintly the scent of his gray mate. Something had gone down the trail afterward leaving no familiar odor—for Loup had worn moccasins soaked in musk. Farther down the wolf halted again. Here the forest litter had been freshly strewn. Step by step the White Devil advanced. The pile of twigs betrayed no lurking danger—but man and the years had taught him that all things are dangerous. The wolf nosed the pile, sniffing, raised his head, sniffed again.

Among the litter lay a single twig on which, in laying the trap, Loup had breathed. Faint as a whisper, but deeper in portent than a cry of warning, the man-smell rose to the killer's brain. Death was there. Something urged him to leap the pile, but a deeper instinct, the life-instinct of the wild thing, held him back.

Abruptly he left the trail and picked his way along the cañon rim. A dozen times the White Devil returned, picking up the tracks of his mate each time lower down. An hour before dawn he peered down upon the open park bathed in moonlight that touched in silvery outline the cold, gray object lying there. The scent was strong but strange, and mingled with it was the heavy odor of blood. The White Devil drew nearer, stopping just outside the little circle of traps so carefully hidden. He whimpered faintly—why did she lie so strangely quiet between those two glittering things? Then as he circled the glazed eyes appeared and the head, shattered by Loup's bullet. The blood-smell told him all.

The moon moved slowly across the sky. The stars faded, but the solitary figure did not move. He knew now what those piles of twigs and pine-needles concealed; he understood the circle of death and the smell of the hunter. Slowly it all connected. The smell of Loup, the traps, and now his dead mate. The man had killed her. And the man-scent always turned toward the same ranch in the valley below. The wolf's eyes went red. Caution was drowned in the crimson flood of fury that swept over him calling him to kill, rend and destroy. The ranch-house!

A cry tore from the White Devil's throat that sent the rabbits scurrying to their burrows and stampeded in terror a little band of deer in the valley beyond. Tongue lolling, fangs bared, he raced toward the den of this man-thing. Low limbs tugged at his fur as he tore up the cañon and down the long slope. A calf dozing in the trail crashed among the pines in an ecstasy of fear. The wolf leaped, ripped her throat like a saber blow and even before she had fallen to her knees whisked on down the path.

The white killer was abroad.

Caution was forgotten; the deep-seated fear of man had died in the memory of the cold dead thing that once had been his. Across the valley beneath the lower rim of pines Cameron's ranch-house appeared. The White Devil raced on.

Bum, the Airedale, trotted from the shadow of the barn, then froze into an immobility of fear. As the wolf closed, the dog turned and flattened to the ground. Too late. The white teeth sank in the back of Bum's neck, a cry half-begun broke into a gurgle of agony. The gleaming fangs met through the Airedale's spine, and the killer, with a toss of his neck, threw the limp body over his shoulder. A whinny of fright from the barn, a flash of white through the open window; a snarl, and Cameron's pride of saddle-horses lay kicking out his life in the stall.

A flash of white as the wolf leaped out and raced for the timber. The crack of a rifle and the spat of angry lead before him made him veer. Two more shots, and the wolf had gained the timber. He paused, looking back with red wicked eyes, his jaws set in a grin more crimson than the fast reddening east. Above in the pasture ten head of steers were grazing, steers that Cameron was holding for the coming stock show. The eyes of the killer snapped—here was work to be done.

At the sound of the first terrified bellow, Cameron raced up the field. Two steers were unharmed when he arrived. The rest lay still or gasping on the ground. The killer had passed on.

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Two miles down the road a young collie, with the temerity of early puppyhood, barked from beneath a gate at the white figure speeding by. The wolf paused long enough to crush the dog's skull and loped on. A mile ahead stood the cabin of Gaspar, the Canadian. Inside a half-emptied bottle stood by the bunk where Gaspar lay in sodden sleep. In a pen by the corral a band of sheep nibbled hungrily the remnants of alfalfa left from yesterday's feeding. Good hunting here.

Leaping on their backs, striking to right and left, breaking their backs with his very weight, tearing their throats as he pinned them with huge paws, the White Devil wrought swift havoc among the herd.

Finally, he paused panting, no longer white but crimson Steam rose from his body heated with exertion and with blood. Froth speckled with red dropped from his lolling jaws. Gaspar slept on.

Approaching the cabin, the killer reared his fore paws upon the sill and looked within. The sun streaming over the eastern hills threw the wolf's shadow like a sinister spectre across the inert body of the man. The killer's body twitched.

How easy—a leap that would shatter the panes and land him on the upturned throat. How easy. The huge shoulder muscles tightened. Gaspar stirred fitfully in growing light and opened two bleary eyes that an instant later were transfixed in terror at the apparition outlined against the rising sun. The vision vanished. The wolf had gone.

A bottle crashed in the farthest corner of the cabin, and with both hands raised to heaven Gaspar made a trembling prayer to his guardian saints.

By noon the tale of the raid had sped throughout the length of the Hills. As far as the telephones extended anxious wives repeated and enlarged the tale. Grim-faced ranchers strapped on heavy Colts they had not carried for years and rode their pasture fences to see that no cattle might stray; mothers kept their children beside them; barns were tightened and kept locked; dogs were shut in, and even the far-off cry of a coyote brought anxious faces to the windows.

The killer was abroad.

With the sunset a damp wind crept in from the north, swaying the complaining pines and gathering heavy clouds. A few flakes fell. A stronger gust and the storm broke, obliterating the hills, blotting out in its swirling fury the world of beast and man.

CAMERON gazing into the white nothingness outside the window sat motionless. On his lap lay all that remained of his old comrade, Bum.

The door opened, admitting a blast of wind that rattled the tins in the kitchen beyond, and Loup's voice at his shoulder said quietly—

"I got the mate."

Cameron looked up slowly.

"You sure raised ——, didn't you?" His voice trembled with pent-up bitterness. "You likewise got my best bronc, eight steers, all Gaspar's sheep and old Bum."

"The White Devil?"

"Who else—we've been paid a friendly call, you might say, and when the storm's over we can sure expect another."

Loup's right hand clenched. The swarthy face grew red with the fresh defeat. For a long time he stood at the window meditating, watching the north wind fling its serried snow battalions across the world. The shadows of dusk, creeping from the corners of the room, slowly enshrouded him. Cameron, with bowed head, fondled the shaggy body of Bum. Loup looked down at the man who with wet eyes fondled the limp and mangled form on his knees. His shoulders straightened and again he touched Cameron's shoulder.

"I'm turning in now," he said.

The storm lasted all that night and the next—the May blizzard of the Black Hills was on. With the dawn of the third day, the clouds broke, revealing a fairy world of snow-laden pines and granite pinnacles buried three feet deep in the last cloak of Winter. Cameron was out early, breaking ground for the steers of his lower pasture and hauling alfalfa. Loup came up, wearing long snow shoes called Canadian racers. He carried a rifle, and his face was blackened with soot against snow-blindness.

"Goin'll be bad until the snow crusts," said Cameron. "What's your plan?"

"Deep snow," Loup waved his hand. "I'll get his trail and track him. Run him down. He's had no food for three days and no chance to eat while I'm on his trail."

With a hasty gesture, the tall, lonely figure turned away.

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Cameron watched him with eyes in which admiration and wonder blended.

"No blanket, no grub-pile, and figures on running down the killer."

ABOVE, among the craggy heights of Harney Peak the White Devil strode to the entrance of the cave that for two days had been his home. The storm had passed, and the plains beneath were dotted with shadows of broken clouds skidding before the north wind. Leaving the cave, he climbed the nearest pinnacle. Progress was slow and difficult; at each step he sank shoulder-deep in the soft snow, but the hunger need drove him on.

He sniffed at the tracks of an ermine—a cold trail—retraced his steps and ploughed through the white softness down the slope. The wind died. The glittering world seemed devoid of life; the white silence broken only by the soft rush of snow as some overladen pine branch let fall its burden to the drifts below. The valley showed no trace of food. Coyotes had holed up; there came no scent of deer or cattle.

Hunger gnawed, but a deeper ache lay within him—the bitter ache that for two sleepless nights had kept him unwelcome company upon the mountain—the memory of the twisted, silent shape in the valley. The wolf's lips curved back at the thought of that night and of the red haze of killing that followed. Such nights of vengeance would be many now—he would exact full toll of men-things.

At the mouth of Roaring Creek he turned and descended a cañon leading toward the plains. Food would be there, a full pen of fattened sheep, perhaps, or a calf. Danger would be there too—dogs that barked and brought their masters, who flung lightning from their shoulders and placed snapping jaws of steel in the trail or little white powdered pellets in meat. Pellets that he had seen eaten by other wolves—wolves that had quickly grown stiff and moved no more.

At the edge of the timber he stopped, then turning and carefully stepping in his foot-prints, retraced his steps a hundred yards. Here he stopped and leaped sidewise, landing ten feet from his trail. Beneath a jack-pine he crawled, breasting his way into the snow until only his head was above the level of the white blanket. Here he would lie until twilight, secure in the knowledge that whoever might be tracking him would have to pass.

For three hours he lay motionless, then ever so slightly, turned his head toward the trail; his ears twitched forward, then lay back on his head and he seemed to sink deeper beneath the snow.

Thirty feet away Loup emerged from among the pines, moving swiftly and with no sound. Even against the wind the scent reached the wolf's nostrils, and his eyes again went red—it was the thing that never slept—the hated thing that had destroyed his mate. A momentary madness urged him to rise and spring.

Loup stopped in full sight, his own eyes, red and swollen from the blinding snow-glare. He, too, sniffed the wind that brought a vague inarticulate warning; a message whose purport lay hidden. He glanced eagerly ahead, flicked a bit of snow from the rifle-sight and passed from view. Instantly the White Devil sprang to life, whirling the snow before him he raced up the slope at right angles from the trail, back into the deeper shadows of the timber. Hunger, and for the moment hate, was forgotten—he must get away.

At the edge of the timber Loup checked a bitter curse and sped back over the trail, casting eager glances about him. The fresh tracks lay plainly to his left. The wolf had gone. His lips set in a snarl, and settling his gun in the hollow of his arm he followed. But the chance of surprize had gone irrevocably. It would be a test of endurance now. A long battle of heartbreaking hours fought through the pitiless snow with hunger the ally and enemy of both hunter and hunted, and above both the spirit of death, hovering, waiting.

Evening fell. Night lay upon the hills like the purple pall of some mighty monarch. The trail was plain, and Loup kept on. Drops of sweat that had fallen upon his jacket froze. Here the wolf had lain down for an hour to rest. Here he had scratched at a dead stump for food. Loup smiled. Hunger was beginning to lend its aid. The tracks were leading up now, up among the granite wilderness of Harney Peak where the White Devil so often had shaken pursuit from his trail. Here the wolf had stopped before a cave, had gone in and lain down. Loup entered and lighting a match looked about him. Little particles of frozen snow that the killer had gnawed from between

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his toes lay on the floor. Again the shadowy smile passed over Loup's face. For an hour he rested, then buckled on his snow-shoes and took the trail. A crust had formed on the snow, supporting the snow-shoes and aiding the hunter's speed, but the wolf broke through at every step.

Worn out with two days and nights of ceaseless travel, racked by hate and fear, wearied from breaking the snow drifts and from that mad night of killing, the White Devil struggled on. Hunger burned within him, his feet left bright red spots behind him on the snow. The proud head hung wearily as he floundered through a snow filled pass. He looked back. Barely a mile beneath him in a ravine not yet touched by the rising sun moved the figure of the pursuer.

Into the wolf's wild heart crept a new fear, aided by hunger and utter weariness. Would there be no end; no way to shake off this creature that trod so lightly on the snow?

Dropping behind the ridge, the White Devil hastened on. A rabbit scurried frantically down the slope unnoticed. One thought remained; to lose this clinging, following thing; to get away. The killer swayed a little, leaped a log and fell, rose stiffly and went on.

The blinding, killing day passed slowly. For hunter and hunted time had ceased. The shadows shortened, then lengthened toward the east. Evening came, and the stars. Ever the strange duel went on. The White Devil back-tracked, using all the cunning of his kind and all the wisdom of his years. Once Loup lost the trail where the wolf had walked a bare ridge. Later, by a lucky guess, he had gained a half-mile by leaving the circling tracks and picking them up at the head of a farther cañon.

The man too was weak from lack of food. No thought of turning back. It was the wolf or the white silence forever. Night brought ease to his swollen eyes. Here the White Devil had sunk to earth; here he had struck against a tree as if blinded. Here he had forced himself through a drift high as the hunter's shoulder and here, where the snow was flecked with blood, he had bitten from his torn feet the frozen, clinging snow. Loup passed a weary hand across his forehead. He stumbled on.

As the sky reddened beyond the plains with the light of a third day the White Devil reached the end. Dragging his leaden body back along the trail, he clambered to a rock jutting above him and lay down. If the two-legged thing that walked on snow were still following it hardly mattered. Nothing mattered but rest and sleep and then food. The massive head sank between his bloody paws.

Minutes passed. A half-hour. Then the scrape of snowshoes on the glittering crust. Unsteadily the killer rose, each hair of the white pelt on end, and suddenly hunger, fear and weariness had melted in the flame of his hatred as snow melts in the heat of a Summer day. Ten feet away, each step bringing him nearer, the hunter stalked, head bowed, eyes on the trail. Almost beneath the wolf he paused, and the animal's body quivered.

Slowly Loup raised his head. Hunter and hunted gazed for an instant into each others eyes. Brief as the beat of a bird's wing, Loup, killer of a thousand wolves, and the White Devil of the Black Hills stood at gaze. Then, before a man might take breath, the rifle snapped forward and the wolf sprang. Straight at the beast's breast the barrel pointed; Loup's finger tightened; the hammer clicked dully. The rifle that had never failed missed fire!

Even before the realization reached Loup's brain the weight of the killer crushed him back. Swift as thought, Loup turned and dropped. The white, bared fangs clicked, ripping the heavy clothing from the man's shoulder. A stab of pain wrung a whispered gasp from Loup's lips. The wolf, turning in the air, landed behind him; Loup, with clubbed rifle, to meet the second attack, sprang. Like coils of steel the killer's legs doubled, then straightened, hurling the menace of jaw and fang through the air again. Loup, swinging the rifle with all his strength, met the wolf in midair. A crack resounded as when a mighty branch is torn in the wind. The rifle-stock split. Loup felt the hot breath of the killer on his face.

CAMERON, seated before the fire, looked up. Slow, uncertain footsteps splashed in the melting snow outside the cabin. A hand fumbled for a moment at the latch and as the door opened, Loup sprawled, face down, across the threshold.

The rancher lifted him to the cot and cut

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away the sleeve of the blood-soaked mackinaw, then bathed and bandaged the torn shoulder. As he finished, Loup for a moment opened his eyes.

"You'll find the White Devil back there," he whispered, raised a limp hand toward the mountains and fell asleep.

For two nights and a day he slept as the dead. On the second day, Cameron, at noon, found Loup devouring a half-cooked leg of mutton.

"One sure gets hungry after three days fastin'," Cameron observed. "Goodson and me followed your tracks this morning and brought in the White Devil. Goodson's gone for a pair of scales. That wolf must weigh over a hundred and fifty."

Loup ate in silence, as if for him the subject had no interest.

"The country's wild over the kill," Cameron continued; "the boys are coming up tonight to tell you about it. The ranchers are makin' up a purse in addition to the bounty. Oh, you'll hear all about it tonight."

Loup looked up. "Tonight?"

"You bet tonight. The snow's almost gone, and we're aimin' to put on a celebration bigger 'n Armistice Day. I'm off for Custer to get some grub."

Loup smiled slightly and again attacked the mutton. That night within Cameron's barn a little knot of men gazed in wondering silence at the beast that for four years had robbed and defied them. Huge and malevolent, he lay, black lips drawn back, grim and defiant to the end.

Gaspar, kneeling beside the stiffened body rose with a hoarse cry. He pointed a shaking finger at the wolf's throat.

"*Sacré nom*, the mark of teeth!" His voice rose to a frightened squeak. "The mark of teeth and no bullet-hole! It may be that Gaspar is not one such fool after all. *Sacré nom d'un nom!*"

The men, with one accord, surged to the ranch house where Cameron met them with a puzzled look.

"Loup's gone," he said.

MINNE-BO-ZAHN (RAIN)

by Frank H. Huston

IN THE long ago it seems that there was a Gros Ventre Indian, a mighty hunter who seldom failed to drop a quarter or a side at the teepee of some widow or other member of the band. He'd put in a big day one time and, being tired, lay down alongside his kill and fell alseep. Of course the buzzards and coyotes gathered; and the eagles—all four, the golden, the bald, the brown and the spotted tail—came to see what the trouble was.

They grabbed him off to the Thunder Bird's nest on a high bluff with perpendicular sides, back in the Black Hills; and though he tried again and again he couldn't climb down; but, searching and projecting around, he ran across the young ones of the eagles and the Thunder Bird.

After a while, when they got acquainted, the young ones told him that a big two-headed snake with long horns came once in a while and gobbled up a few of the nestlings and that their parents had brought him there to kill that snake. Sure enough, when the old birds came back they admitted as much and asked him to kill the snake.

The eagles called together all kinds of birds, and they started to bathe in a rain-pool in the rocks. The fluttering and wing-flapping scattered water over all outdoors, so much so that it made a regular fog, under cover of which the snake crawled up and attacked the eagle's young ones.

The Gros Ventre notched a medicine arrow and mortally wounded the reptile. Then he took his knife and cut it into four parts—the four winds—one for each—four being the medicine or mystic number of the plains tribes—each carrying a cloud containing Rain, Hail, Fog and Snow.

Then the Thunder Bird asked him to cut it into four more pieces to represent showers and squalls—which he did, keeping the horns to put in his medicine sack.

He asked the eagles to show him how and why they made rain, but they answered that Atr Wahanda had closed their mouths on that subject; that he already had seen how they made the fog. Then they carried him back home again.

So every one knows who and what makes it rain. How and why it is done is a mystery to the plains tribes; but they reckon it is done by the birds bathing, as sparrows do in rain-pools.

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The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOME first-hand information on the death of Riley Grannan. You'll remember that our magazine published—and, at your request, published a second time—the funeral sermon preached over his body by the Rev. Mr. Knickerbocker. Some of the old-timers have spoken at Camp-Fire of Mrs. Belle Dormer and now she rises to speak for herself:

Campbell, California.

There is a little last chapter in the life of the "Great Wheat Plunger," Riley Grannan, that perhaps no one but myself can furnish you.

AT THE time of his death (though he did not die in my house) he was a guest at my place, the Hotel Dormer in Rawhide, Nevada, one of the richest, most spectacular and short-lived gold-mining camps in the State of Nevada, situated about 30 miles from Shurz, a railroad town on the main line from San Francsico to Tonopah, Nevada. Next to my hotel was the "Barrell House," then the "Northern Tex Rickard's place." The Reverend Mr. Knickerbocker was also a guest of the hotel, as was Nat Goodwin, G. Graham Rice and many other well-known men.

The water to supply the town was hauled in barrels from "Dead Horse Wells," twelve miles distant—a large barrel of this water, which was excellent, was always kept in the back of the hotel lobby. One evening before retiring, about 12 o'clock, Grannan came through the hotel saying he would like a drink of water and a pitcher full to take to his rooms. I asked if he was feeling bad. He replied that he was only tired—had been sitting in a game up at the Northern for nearly twenty-four hours.

The next morning the Swedish chamber-maid rushed into my room all excitement, declaring "the little man upstairs in room 12 has got it!" I lost no time in getting to his room. I knew what *it* meant—desert pneumonia—the town was full of it. It ran its course in from twelve to twenty-four hours.

I FOUND Mr. Grannan sitting on the edge of his bed, his head in his hands. He looked up as I entered, his face flushed, his eyes glistening with fever. "Send for Tex," he said, "and don't let me go to sleep. If I go to sleep, I'll never wake up."

I sent for Tex and the doctor. When Tex came he brought the "Big Swede" (I never heard any other name for the man) and big Jack Reynolds with him. They all thought it would be better for Grannan in the quiet home of the Big Swede than in the hotel where it was quite noisy.

Jack Reynolds wrapped a blanket about Grannan,

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picked him up in his arms as he would a little child, carried him downstairs and through the streets to the home of the Big Swede where they put him on the bed where he fell asleep never to waken again in this life.

THE funeral sermon by the Reverend Mr. Knickerbocker was delivered in a large room across the street from the hotel, that was used as a court-room and general meeting-place.

Everybody in the town of Rawhide and many from Shurz attended the funeral, and so passed over the "Great Divide" a quiet, unassuming little gentleman whose friends were legion.

At one time Riley Grannan was known as the greatest "plunger" in the wheat pit of Chicago.—(MRS.) BELLE DONNER.

AS EXPLAINED at last Camp-Fire, "Sir Judas" in this issue is one of two stories by Rafael Sabatini taken from his collection, "Historical Nights' Entertainment," which is to appear very shortly as a book in this country, as it has already done in England.

Here is a paragraph out of a letter from comrade William J. Cooper, Keeper of Camp-Fire Station 65, in Wales:

Did you see Sabatini nearly got drowned in the Derwent River up here in Cumberland? Stepped into a hole whilst fast on a salmon, but got out and landed fish.—WILLIAM J. COOPER.

TWO bank robberies, Henry Starr and a very pertinent question anent the proposed national and State anti-weapon laws:

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I note the account in Camp-Fire of Henry Starr's last adventure. It is in the main correct, but it gives something less than due credit to Mr. W. Y. Myers who killed the outlaw. I have recently been in the Ozarks and at Harrison and had a long visit with Mr. Myers himself (now president of the Farmers' Bank). Also heard the story from other participants in and witnesses of the affair; and saw and handled the rifle used by Mr. Myers, which is still on duty in the vault of the First National Bank at Harrison.

THE facts are that Mr. Myers was an officer of the bank and was held up along with the others when the Starr gang came in. Myers was held standing close to the vault door. The man holding him there turned his head momentarily for some little distraction, and Mr. Myers, with instantaneous presence of mind and prompt nerve, leaped into the vault and seized the rifle. A second later, firing through the open vault door, he shot Henry Starr through the middle of the body, Starr at the moment being bent over rummaging in the safe, which, according to the foolish habit of many banks in this section, stood outside the vault and toward the front of the bank.

The shot, as will anything in the nature of an alarm, broke up the robbery and the gang fled. Mr. Myers followed them out but was unable to do any more effective shooting for fear of hitting the other officials in the bank and townspeople on the street.

IN THIS connection, let me call your attention to another smash-up of a daylight bank robbery which was the most complete and clean-cut defeat of a hold-up gang that has ever occurred and has called forth congratulatory telegrams and praise from banks ranging from Maine to California. I refer to the affair at Eureka Springs, Arkansas, just a few miles from Harrison, on September 27th last, only seven weeks ago. The score was three of the gang killed and the other two seriously shot up and now recovering but in jail. No one else hurt and not even a plate-glass window broken.

Four of the gang, some of whom are said to have belonged to the old Starr gang, entered the First National Bank at eleven in the morning, leaving one outside with a car. At first they stood around for a moment, and Cashier E. B. Smith, sizing them up, turned in the bank's robbery alarm which sounded bells in the other bank, in the telephone office and in the Basin Park Hotel. The result was that when the four robbers emerged with $70,000 in loot and Cashier Smith and Asst. Cashier Sawyer between them as hostages, they found their car driven away, the driver killed, and a number of determined armed citizens facing them from all directions. Smith and Sawyer had the presence of mind to break away from the rattled robbers, and the gun battle commenced. When it was over, all in eight minutes from the start of the hold-up, Wilson and George Price were lying dead, Mark Hendricks, the car driver, was dying and Charles Price and John Cowan were helpless with wounds.

The men who made Eureka Springs famous by this clean-up were Ernie A. Jordon, jeweler; Robert Bowman, hotel clerk; Jess Littrell, store-keeper; Cashier Burson of the Bank of Eureka, Joe McKinney, Sam Harmon and Constable Homer Brittain.

IT SHOULD be noted that an alarm system was what made this remarkable hold-up defeat possible; and in this connection allow me to remark that it is not uncommon to see burglar alarms slightingly referred to by some fiction writers. While alarms in stores and residences may be defeatable, there is a type of complete system for bank vault protection, made and installed by several different concerns (so this is not an advertisement for some one) which type has never been defeated by burglars after over twenty years of use. Why don't all banks have it? For the same reason, I suppose, that there are people in the world who still do their plowing with a crooked stick.

One thing more: Had the proposed Sullivan law amendment prohibiting manufacture and possession of firearms been the enforced law of the land, how would those plucky law-upholding citizens of Harrison and Eureka Springs ever have brought those robberies to naught? The robbers would have had guns just the same—never doubt that unless you believe that there is no more whisky in the country since the 18th amendment.—H. F. L. (late Captain Inf. U. S. Army).

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PERHAPS this shouldn't have jolted me, but it did. It's part of a letter to Negley Farson from a friend after reading Mr. Farson's "It's Only a Question of Time" in our November 20th issue. The last few words furnished the jolt.

Never having had any unusual experiences before going into business—I am now advertising manager for the —— company, and being indoors most of the time—I have often thought, as your old-time critics thought, that "such things don't happen." So when I read your story and your letter to *Adventure*, knowing that *you* did exist and had been most everywhere I immediately enjoyed every good yarn I had ever read in *Adventure* 100% more because I came to believe that the boys who spin these yarns for us have been there—and know!

I'd just been doping along, knowing that practically all our writers make their stories out of material they know at first-hand and that at least many of you also know it. I don't mean, of course, that Hugh Pendexter was adventuring around America in Colonial times or Harold Lamb in Asia some centuries ago, and I naturally don't mean that any author has experienced all or even a considerable portion of the things that happen in his stories. But our writers' brigade certainly does know the material it handles and knows it from experience in the general field concerned or, like Pendexter, Lamb, Brodeur and others, from long and careful study of material no living man can know at first hand.

So when this reader is surprized over evidence that our writers "have been there" it jolts me. Sets me wondering how many other readers are going along in the belief that our stories are written by men who merely sit at desks and imagine what the South Sea, etc., would be like. Well, I don't see any way of proving the opposite. The authors' autobiographies in Camp-Fire ought to be some evidence, as should Camp-Fire in general, but maybe these readers think Camp-Fire letters are faked. Of course, if these doubting readers know some particular region themselves they can check up on stories laid in that particular region, but I've an idea all who do know some of the fields for adventure are already convinced and that it's only those, like the writer of the above, not familiar with things outside their own unadventurous lives, who doubt the groundwork of veracity we try to have under all our stories.

Guess I'll just have to stay jolted. But I wish the doubters would elect a committee and send it to the office. Our correspondence files or even a day's correspondence ought to convince 'em that not only out writers but very many of our readers know or have known adventure at first hand.

READ this appeal and form your own judgment. Then act on that judgment.

An Appeal by the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico to the People of the United States

We, the undersigned representatives of the 20 pueblos of New Mexico, assembled in council at Santo Domingo on November the 5th, 1922, make this appeal to the American people for fair play and justice and the preservation of our pueblo life.

We, the Pueblo Indians, have always been self-supporting and have not been a burden on the government. We have lived in peace with our fellow-Americans even while we have watched the gradual taking away of our lands and waters. Today, many of our pueblos have the use of less than an acre per person of irrigated land, whereas in New Mexico 10 acres of irrigated land are considered necessary for a white man to live on. We have reached a point where we must either live or die.

Now we discover that the senate has passed a bill, called the Bursum bill, which will complete our destruction, and that congress and the American people have been told that we, the Indians, have asked for this legislation. This, we say, is not true. We have never asked for this legislation. We were never given the chance of having anything to say or do about this bill. We have studied the bill over and found that this bill will deprive us of our happy life by taking away our lands and water and will destroy our pueblo government and our customs which we have enjoyed for hundreds of years, and through which we have been able to be self-supporting and happy down to this day.

The bill will take away our self-respect and make us dependent on the government and force us into court to fight over and to settle things which we have always settled among ourselves without any cost to the government.

Before this bill passed the senate we had trusted the government, and now we find that unless this bill is beaten, the government will betray our trust. We cannot understand why the Indian office and the lawyers who are paid by the government to defend our interests, and the secretary of the interior, have deserted us and failed to protect us this time. The Pueblo officials have tried many times to obtain an explanation of this bill from officials of the Indian office and the attorneys of the government and have always been put off and even insulted, and on one occasion when a Pueblo Indian talked with that government attorney who drew this Bursum bill, about the bill, he was told that he was "ungrateful" and "no good." Knowing that the bill was being framed a delegation from Laguna, the largest pueblo, waited 11 hours for a chance to discuss it with the

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Commissioner of Indian Affairs at Albuquerque. At the end of this time, the commissioner granted 10 minutes, in which he answered no question that the Pueblos had come to ask.

After we failed to get an explanation from government officials who are supposed to help us, we have ourselves studied what this bill will do to our life and our land, and have come together today to make a move by which we can appeal to the American people.

The Pueblos, as is well known, existed in a civilized condition before the white man came to America. We have kept our old customs and lived in harmony with each other and with our fellow-Americans.

This bill will destroy our common life and will rob us of everything which we hold dear—our lands, our customs, our traditions.

Are the American people willing to see this happen?

(SIGNED by representatives of twenty pueblos.)

I wrote the following letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Chas. H. Burke:

December 27, 1922.

Friends of years' standing, of proved integrity and judgment, ask me to publish in this magazine an appeal from the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico against the Bursum bill. If the facts stated in this appeal are true, there is enough official rottenness in this matter to nauseate honest and decent American citizens already weary of betrayals of public trust by public officials. If the facts stated in this appeal are not true, they cry aloud for public, printed, signed denial by you yourself, by the author of the bill, by the Government attorney who drew the bill, by all officials of the Indian Office concerned and by every Senator who worked or voted for the bill.

Since you are the public official to whom is particularly entrusted the welfare of these Indians I am giving you opportunity to present to the public through this magazine whatever reply you see fit to make to this appeal, limiting you only to an amount of space approximating not more than twice that used by the body of the appeal itself.

Since the bill has already passed the Senate, any presentation of the case by this magazine must be made at an early date. Therefore, unless your reply is received by January 7, 1923, it will probably be too late to print it along with the appeal of the Indians, magazines being made up some time ahead. Lack of reply by January 15, will be taken as proof that you are not willing to reply.

It is my intention to print the appeal, this letter, your reply if any, and a reply in rebuttal by the Indians.

I would suggest in the interest of your own case that a specific statement be made by you as to the intended disposition of the land and water the bill proposes to take from the Indians, with a definite statement of who stands to profit by this disposition. In case the bill becomes law this magazine intends to interest itself and its readers in a systematic investigation into what hands said land and water actually do pass and into what individuals, private or public, profit therefrom.

I would suggest, too, that the charge that you granted only ten minutes to the Indians for a hearing of their case calls for specific reply, as also in particular the charges that the Indian Office has failed to furnish them explanation of the bill and that Congress and the American people have been told the Indians asked for this legislation.

Enclosed is a copy of the appeal in question, "An Appeal by the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico to the People of the United States."

The Commissioner replied but stated that his reply was not for publication. Therefore it is not published.

THE following occurs in a letter from Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall, to Senator Borah relative to this matter:

Since I have been Secretary of the Interior I have made no speeches to the public, dictated no statements for the newspapers and engaged in no propaganda of any kind or character, even in the attempt to answer charges made against myself or my Department, which charges have sometimes been of a most villainous character; as for example, in the so-called discussion of the present bill by various volunteer representatives of the Indians and through them presumably printed and commented upon by newspapers and periodicals which the public naturally have a right to presume would investigate charges before endorsing them. My course has been to report to the Senate and the House of the United States, or to the President of the United States, with reference to the actions of my Department, treating them as officials of the United States Government, among whom I am one. This I have conceived to be my duty, and I am following that course in the present instance, and this is my justification for imposing upon you.

I like the sound of this policy better than its results.

IN THE same letter the Secretary states that the Bursum bill was the result of a conference between the Commissioner, the attorney representing the white claimants to the land and the attorney representing the Indians (the last not being an Indian or a private citizen chosen by them but Col. R. E. Twitchell, Assistant Attorney General, representing the Department of Justice in charge of Indian Affairs litigation), that all these parties agreed to the bill, that it met with his own approval and that, with the general approval of the Department, it was presented to Congress "for the purpose of enabling that body to adopt some legislation tending to . . . finally put at rest the controversial questions which have agitated the people of New Mexico . . . for more than 300 years."

The particular conclusion advocated in this presentment to Congress, the result of

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a compromise in which the Indians were represented by only a Government official, is evidently extremely unsatisfactory to the Indians. The cause of the "controversial question" is lack of clarity in the legal rights involved, notably the legal right of individual Indians to dispose of Pueblo lands, on which right is based the claim of the white claimants.

At the end of his letter the Secretary mentions that among evidence offered to Congress may be found interesting matter concerning certain of the particular individuals who are now, under the cloak of protection to the Indians, engaged in misleading statements, some of them in absolutely false statements, knowing same to be false, and some of them in defamatory statements concerning officials of the Indian Bureau and of this Department. He does not, however, show in what way this point affects the rights of the case itself, nor is the evidence in question where we can examine it.

From the formal protest of artists and writers against the Bursum bill:

To the American Public:

When legislation affecting the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico has been introduced in Congress by a senator from that state, with the alleged support of the Indians and apparent approval of the Indian office; when it has been briefly questioned by Senator Borah and then accepted by the Senate unanimously, the American public might suppose the legislation known as the Bursum Indian Bill to be an act dealing justly with the Indians and bringing credit to the state and nation responsibly concerned.

As it happens, the American public would be deceived. The bill, which has passed a misinformed Senate and is now before the House, is grossly unjust to the Indians, violates every official protestation that the government is their protector, and is, moreover, in such imminence of becoming law that only that vaguely accessible power, the public, can prevent a great wrong.

The Indians, helpless politically, have issued, with one voice from all the pueblos, a dignified but moving manifesto, asking for fair play.

Adding our voice to theirs in this emergency, we, the undersigned, who have had an opportunity to study conditions among the villages and to understand the faithless provisions of the projected law, and who intend doing our best to expose the facts, call upon the American people to protest immediately against the impending Bursum Indian Bill, whether in its present form or with disingenuous amendments. We ask this for the sake of the Pueblos, who, though probably the most industrious and deserving of all our Indian wards, are now threatened with the loss of their lands and of their community existence. We ask it even more for the sake of Americans themselves, as a test of national honor.

The Eastern Association on Indian Affairs opposes the Bursum bill in the Senate and a similar bill introduced by Congressman Snyder in the House and advocates the bill introduced by Senator Jones as "carefully drawn to safeguard the interests of the Indians and at the same time fair to the whites who have taken up Indian land in good faith." This Jones bill, says the Association, has the support also of the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs, Indian Welfare Committee of the Federation of Women's Clubs and other friends of the Indians.

The address of the Association is 115 East 55th Street, New York. Mrs. Alice Corbin Henderson, Camino del Montesol, Santa Fé, New Mexico, is an officer of the Western Association. Detailed information can be secured from them. The Department of the Interior will furnish voluminous data. Examine the case for yourselves, form your own judgment and get after your representatives in the Senate and House—unless Congress has acted before this reaches you.

Whatever its source, there is a very rotten smell emanating from this matter.

A SUGGESTION from Gordon Young of our writers' brigade. Ought to bring out some interesting experiences.

Catalina.

I suggest that, when you have room for a new subject, that you start a little Camp-Fire discussion as to *What has given you the biggest thrill?* What sport or game or incident? I am prompted to this suggestion by sword-fishing, marine sword-fish, that is. I never got the "kick" out of any other sport that I get from seeing ten or twelve foot fish rise out of the water—clear out, leaping from ten to thirty times, a shimmering blue gray, like tempered steel. I suppose tarpoon fishing gives much the same thrill. I have never fished tarpoon. Anyhow, some day you might inject the query as to the thrills in sport, and see what answers come.—Gordon Young.

IT LOOKS to me as if this challenge of some of the details in Arthur M. Harris's series of articles on famous pirates were very thoroughly met by the author. These articles, as Mr. Harris states, were drawn from what historians call "first sources" and one of their chief values is that they give us, so far as obtainable anywhere, the cold, uncolored facts concerning these gay gentry of the seas instead of the usual tales

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woven so largely from imagination and misapprehension.

It seems to me a strong proof of Mr. Harris's accuracy that there has been, as I remember, only this one letter that even questioned the authoritativeness of his statement. There are among you quite a few authorities on pirates and piracies—no offense meant!—and if he'd slipped up anywhere he would have been called to account very promptly.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Hope you will not think me too critical if I suggest there is no reason to think Kidd's ship was a "galley." At this time galleys were pretty well discredited for anything but close along-shore work. There was still in the French navy an officer called "General of his Majesty's galleys" but after one disastrous experience in sending some of them around from Toulon to Brest no more long voyages were risked.

At this time double-barreled names were common. There was, for instance, the Bombay Castle which was not a castle.

The best account of Kidd I have ever seen is an article in Vol. 14 of *Hunt's Merchants Magazine* and though it lacks the somewhat imaginative conversational bits, I venture to think it better than yours. Think it might pay you to read it. One matter I would like to have cleared up. The *Hunt's Merchants Magazine* article says the orders to Kidd were to seek out the pirates that were preying on the commerce of the American colonies. That seems more probable than that he was ordered to Madagascar.—P. C.

Olympia, Washington.

Your letter in regard to the article on Captain Kidd has been referred to me. I will attempt to explain the points you mention.

FIRST of all, though, let me say that if you will step into the Public Library, or into any complete law library, and ask for Volume 14 of Howell's State Trials, and begin at page 123 of that volume, you will get the verbatim reports of the trial of Captain Kidd, from which my narrative is in the main composed, and from it you can check me up. This trial is what historians would call a "first source," that is, it is the most authentic source of the information we are concerned with.

You first suggest in your letter that there is no reason for calling the *Adventure* a galley. A galley, as you know, was a ship using both oars and sails, and I am inclined to think that the name persisted after the oar power was discarded. That was my personal idea, and I felt, like you, that perhaps "Adventure-Galley" was a combined name like your illustration of "Bombay Castle." But if you will turn to page 166 of this volume you will see that one Palmer, a sailor on Kidd's ship and one of the witnesses against him, says, in his testimony: "I was not then aboard the *galley*" referring to the *Adventure*. This is but one of numerous allusions, and I concluded that if one of the actual seamen on the *Adventure* called her a galley, it would be presumptuous of me to try to correct him two hundred and more years later.

This may strike you as a fair reason for referring to the *Adventure* as a galley. Perhaps the difficulty comes in confusing galley with the French prison craft, manned apparently entirely by rowers, and which have also been called galleys; or to the fact that a galley, according to Webster's dictionary, was a vessel using oars *with or without* sails. Whatever that may be, the sailors who manned the *Adventure* called her a galley, and that seems to me decisive.

NOW as to Kidd's commission or "orders" against pirates. You will find on page 171 of the volume above referred to the exact commission set out word for word. But you have to notice its language rather carefully. This commission was dated January 26, 1696, and directed Kidd to go and capture four specially named pirates; Captains Too, Ireland, Wake and Maze, "who daily commit many and great piracies, robberies, and depredations upon the seas of America, *and in other parts*." The commission then says "as all such pirates, free-booters, and sea-rovers, being our own subjects or of any other nations associated with them, which you shall meet upon the coast or seas of America, *or in any other seas or ports*." The words I have underlined are important and apt to be overlooked in a casual reading, but in legal effect they opened the seas of the world to Kidd's pursuit of pirates.

Let us dig a little deeper into this matter. To see that this commission was not only not confined to American colonies or waters, but that such were merely incidental to the real commission, turn to page 151 of this volume 14, and you will find the speech of Dr. Newton, Advocate for the Admiralty, and one of the prosecutors of Kidd. Dr. Newton, addressing the judges and the jury, says:

"This Captain Kidd, who thus acted the pirate himself, went from England in April, 1696, with a commission dated the 26th of January, preceding, to take and seize pirates *in the Indian seas*, which were then very much and very dangerously infested by them."

Further on Dr. Newton says again:

"But the captain being come to New York in July, 1696, pretending, *as indeed it was designed he should*, and he had undertaken to make that design good, that *he was going to Madgascar*, which was the known and common receptacle of the pirates in those seas, to take pirates and free the seas from those disturbers of the commerce of mankind," and so on.

Dr. Newton, you will notice if you read his speech in full, does not complain about Kidd's going to Madagascar as if that were against his orders, but because he went there to take pirates and became a pirate himself.

If the *Merchants Magazine* article tends to limit Kidd's orders to the Atlantic coast it tends to create a misapprehension and is inconsistent with the official understanding of those orders as held by the lawyers and judges at Kidd's trial. When in my article I speak of his being commissioned for India I am using the point of view of Kidd's contemporaries.

One word more: the "imaginative conversational bits" you refer to are, to a great extent, and always where significant, the exact language of the parties, as taken, you will see, from the trials, except the interview of Emmott with Bellomont, which you

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will notice I carefully introduced as being an imaginary conversation.

Let me know if I have made any of these things clear.—ARTHUR M. HARRIS.

BACK in June came this letter from Kenneth Howell of our writers' brigade to Noyes and me. He's back in the States now, though we haven't seen him yet.

Bombay, Bombay.

Am knocking about Bombay, drinking in local color and imported beer. Leaving Saturday for London, via Marseilles and Paris, touching at Aden, possibly a more northern port also, on the Red Sea, Suez, Port Said, etc. Nights I wander about this unfathomable Eastern city of Indians. In stations, bazaars, bars. I have a clear concept of British seamen now which I never had before. All of my time on the thirty-two day run to India was spent with the engineers, mates, wireless men, etc. They call the Red Sea "The Graveyard of British Engineers," and I'll say it's ——. One of the wireless men is asleep now on my hotel bed this afternoon. He is threatened with being "shanghaied" off his ship for petty violations of routine.

I'll drink a health to you both tonight and to my *Adventure* friends.—K. H.

SOMETHING from Thomas H. Gill about his story in this issue:

Washington, D. C.

Briefly stated, the basic facts of the "White Devil" are these:

Nine years ago four wolves made their appearance in the Black Hills near Custer. No one knew where they came from; perhaps they drifted eastward from Wyoming; perhaps they separated from the pack that runs south of the Missouri. One by one they fell victim to trap or gun or poisoned bait—all but the white leader. He alone killed livestock to the value of $30,000. Bounties were offered, doubled and redoubled, but without success. I have talked to at least twenty hunters and trappers around Custer, and each had his fling at the white wolf. Finally, in answer to a petition of the ranchers to the Biological Survey, Harry Williams, a Government wolver, was sent to Custer. Williams, I believe, has killed over 1400 wolves and has never quit the trail of one until he got him. Incidentally, two months was the longest it ever took Williams to make his kill. The Custer wolf baffled him for seven. Twice Williams saw him, but it was only a fleeting glimpse—never a chance for a shot. At last he trapped him, trailed him four miles, and shot him. I was in the hills north of Custer at the time of the kill, but got down too late to see the prize. Williams later told me the wolf weighed 88 pounds but was gaunt and shrunk from the constant chase, but in good condition would probably weigh over a hundred.

The existence of the wolf, his cunning and destructiveness are facts. To-day throughout the Rockies and the Black Hills he is more famous than even old "Two-Toes" of Wyoming fame, and the Custer wolf deserves it. He was pure white when he had no business to be; he walked logs to evade pursuit like a mountain lion; he killed wantonly without the excuse of hunger; he returned to no kills; he eluded traps, scorned strychnin bait, and during eight years was seen only three times.

Loop is no counterpart of Williams. There is no mystery as to Williams' birth, personality or methods of killing. He is simply a good fellow, a faithful cog in Uncle Sam's system, and an A-1 wolver. My story is not that of Williams and the Custer wolf but of the "White Devil," whom I have given the characteristics of his historic prototype, and of *Loop*, who is entirely fictitious.

Lord knows where Williams is now—probably holed-up in Wyoming chasing more wolves. We have both hit the same trails.—THOMAS H. GILL.

OUR Camp-Fire stations are spreading over the map. Help make them grow.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

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1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
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2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section*).

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CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

7. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elisabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
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9. New Guinea
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10. Philippine Islands
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11. Hawaiian Islands and China
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12. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

13. Asia, Southern
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15. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
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24. Scandinavia
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

25. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
FRED P. FLEISCHER, 426 15th St., West New York, N. J. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

26. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
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27. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina
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28. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

29. Mexico Part 1 Northern
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30. Mexico Part 2 Southern: and Lower California
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32. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
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39. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

40. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. B. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

41. Western U. S. Part 2 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

42. Western U. S. Part 3 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

43. Western U. S. Part 4 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

44. Western U. S. Part 5 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

45. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

46. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

47. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
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48. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section*)

49. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

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50. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

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DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

MINING and PROSPECTING

VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—**All Shotguns**, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers**, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

All inquiries for information regarding the national parks, how to get there and what to do when you get there, should be addressed to the National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

California

HERE'S a little leaflet Brother Harriman had us print up for him. Send him a stamped, self-addressed envelop and it's yours:

Los Angeles, Calif.

LAND surface 155,980 square miles. Water surface 2,380 square miles. Has highest peak and lowest valley in United States, hottest annual average and coldest annual average, greatest scenic range of form and color. Has over one hundred billion feet, board measure, of standing timber. Produces a greater number of minerals than any other State. In 1921 produced oil worth over $203,000,000. Total of all her minerals that year ran to $268,157,426.

The High Sierras contain 16 peaks rising over 14,000 feet, 30 over 13,000, 40 over 12,000, 48 over 11,000, 75 over 10,000, 120 over 9,000 feet. In this range lies the Lake Tahoe region with more than one hundred lakes besides Tahoe. The Big Tree Park (Sequoia), the Sixty Lake Valley above Kearsarge Pass, pine forests where trees ten feet thick are a common sight, seven living, moving glaciers, the Mother Lode, 178 miles long, from which many millions in gold come annually.

The great central valley of the State is 500 miles long and 20 to 50 miles wide. The coast-line is 1,200 miles long. In California 51 different minerals are mined. There are 25 more not yet developed, yet known to exist there.

The State has a finer example of columnar basalt than Fingal's Cave or Giant's Causeway, in the Devil's Post Pile. It has Salton Sea, 30 miles long and 275 feet below sea-level; Death Valley, 175 miles long and 267 feet below sea-level; Mt. Whitney, 14,502 feet above sea-level; Mt. Lassen, an active volcano; Mt. Shasta and the Marysville Buttes, sleeping volcanoes which may break out again; scores of cinder cones, mud cones, dead craters, geysers, hot springs, mineral springs and solfataras.* It has navigable rivers and tumultuous mountain creeks.

Its climate ranges from torrid to arctic, from bone-dry desert to soaked and dripping wetness. The

*Solfatara. An area or phase of dormant or waning volcanic action characterized by the escape of steam, various gases and sublimates.—*Standard Dictionary.*

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land ranges from barren natural cement to the most productive, from the sand of Sahara to the delta of the Nile and the gardens of ancient Babylon.

It holds areas of mountain country so rough the surveyors gave up in despair and the forest rangers will not attempt to penetrate them. It has areas of desert land where Summer shows barren and burned plain, yet Spring clothes this land with such marvelous foliation and such wonders in color and form of blooms that it is a garden of delight.

The State has 65,000 miles of roads, of which 51,000 are now paved. Multitudes of smaller valleys lie in the spaces between mountain ranges. These range all the way from 300 miles long down to a mile, and all are cultivated with an intensity that increases annually. The agricultural and horticultural production runs the gamut, furnishing practically all vegetable forms known to the continent.

The potential water-power of the State runs to 8,000,000 horse-power. No man knows as yet the production possibilities, since it increases so fast that even the most ardent Californian is amazed. Yet with all the natural advantages of climate, minerals, soil, timber and power, this State made literally no advance until Americans from the East and Middle West took hold of it, after the war with Mexico. Now fully 90 per cent. of the inhabitants are people from east of the Rockies; and yet the idiotic, asinine declaration that only a native son has any chance in California is believed by the ignorant and prejudiced.—E. E. Harriman.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

The Marshall Islanders

"SAVAGE" chiefs that dictate their correspondence to their private secretaries:

Question:—"Please give me the following information about the Marshall Islands:

1. What is the climate like? Do they have many hurricanes? When do they usually come, and do they come from any special quarter?
2. What is the chief produce?
3. Name four each of the most common birds and animals (wild), trees, flowers and creepers. Are there any mosquitoes?
4. Describe the natives and how they dress. What are their living conditions, and what is the usual diet? Are the natives of a care-free temperament such as the Hawaiians? How do they greet a friend?
5. Name several of the most outstanding customs. Do they still have their kings?
6. Which nation's money is used the most? Is much money used? Is shell-money?
7. When an island with a population of, say, five hundred is owned or is under the protectorate of one of the nations, does that nation provide a resident agent (if that is what he is called)?
8. If a man were going down there in the capacity of an overseer, what should he take in the way of clothing and other equipment?
9. Are the native men called kanakas? Or is that name confined to the Hawaiians? Is the *bêche-de-mer* dialect spoken in the Marshall Islands?

This is a rather long list of questions, but I have been unable to find any books which deal with that part of the South Seas. Can you recommend any book or books?

Please do not publish my name."—E. L. P., Santa Rosa, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.:—So long have I been receiving queries on Tahiti and the islands of French Oceania that I have now come to look upon questions pertaining to other islands as a most delightful surprize, especially when those pieces of sun land happen to be the Marshalls. Think back to a jolt of Old Crow—a morning jolt, if you please—and you will then know the "kick" that comes from answering a letter such as yours.

Let us store away our clearing-papers and spread sail for those islands nearest your heart. Already we are climbing over the bulge of this old earth. And now we're just above the equator, picking up the blue-green Marshalls that lie more than twenty-five hundred miles east of our Philippines and half-way between Australia and Japan—the blue-green Marshalls where life, lived under the mandatory rule of Japan since the Versailles Treaty, has become "denaturized and commercialized."

At last! You and I are treading across the long, long slope of the sandy shore of a blue-and-pink lagoon that is awakening in the cool of an island sunset. A few minutes more and we're amongst the slender stems of coconut-trees, making toward a village of comfortable, brown houses.

Is it not good to be here? Never mind if things are not as they are in some other groups that I could take you to. We are just commencing our quest among these three hundred low-lying islands that are grouped into thirty-two circular atolls "with a total land area of only one hundred and fifty-six miles" and some ten thousand jolly, hospitable fellows, the sort of boys and girls we'd like to stay out with until three o'clock of a Sunday morning.

You are questioning me about the climate. Once in a long, long time the Marshalls are rocked by a typhoon or a hurricane, you might just as well learn at the outset. But only occasionally, mark you. Then coconut-trees are sent crashing groundward or hurled far out to sea; whole villages are wiped out in less time than it will take to reach the end of this trail; and *sometimes* entire islands are thrown up from their shallow beds on the coral reefs.

In spite of this terrible destruction the total copra-producing power of the group is not seriously affected. Seven or eight years pass, and new trees have grown again. The last severe hurricane occurred in June, 1905.

The one thing that holds with any regularity is: From December to July blow the northeast trade winds, while the westerly winds and calms are experienced from July to November.

What is the chief produce? Is much money used?

Oh, man, don't you know that these sordid details of life are what make pessimists of us, especially when we turn to "islands of tranquil delight" as a last desperate resort in our quest for happiness? Well, for twenty-five years or more the Marshall Islands trade has been worth several

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hundred thousand pounds to Australia each year. And it has been of value to the islanders—men and women who measure their wealth by the number of coconut-trees they own. Copra, the dried flesh of coconuts, is the only Marshall Islands produce of worth.

I have spoken of trade. Let me say more before we turn into this village. For trade is the life of the islands—and the Marshall Islanders are keen traders, very keen.

Until German rule in the Central Pacific ended, Australian trade had been the most popular with the group. Fully a hundred Australian concerns prospered because of it. Today this is being diverted to Japan, where goods are made more cheaply and where penalties are not imposed upon island produce. Australian trade is doomed forevermore.

But these keenest of traders—they gather and split their nuts, drying them into copra immediately. Then when the traders come round to buy, these shrewd islanders stand by, note-books in hand, to note weights and tally-figures. Always they receive cash payment or the equivalent of the value of their goods in food, clothing and other articles from the traders' stores and schooners. Thoroughly do they know the value of British and Japanese money.

No longer do traders practise the tricks of old. Never again will an unscrupulous skipper trade in a string of glass beads for a ton or two of copra. Mission training and Japanese schools have made this too difficult.

A day or so, and you'll watch your first trading scene. When the schooner's storeroom opens, hundreds of men, women and children will swarm aboard and about the vessel, all eager to possess the things they need most. Then will follow interminable discussions on the purchase of those articles—bars of soap, bottles of perfume, combs and brushes, generous lengths of cloth, cheap but flashy jewelry, knives, fish hooks, hats, boots and shoes, phonographs and clothing. Through the whole of these mighty transactions not a voice will be raised in quarrel.

Too, you're going to observe chiefs come aboard with their private secretaries—old men in frock coats and high hats. In the saloon the trader, sweltering for some million-dollar concern, will display all of his wares. Purchases will be made; the chief will pay for them with cash in Japanese notes; and the royal servants will load them into the great canoes that are to transport them to the palace on the shore. If the business should be done by exchanging copra and the trader throws in a cheap knife, you will hear the chief insist on being given a butcher's outfit.

Slit-eyed ladies of bronze will shop over cups of schooner tea—to the music of innumerable phonographs. For twelve or twenty-four hours this trading will go on without a break, beneath a pitiless tropical sun.

At last the captain, anxious to be miles out beyond the lagoon with a favorable wind at his back, closes shop. Invariably he must give the young ladies a great deal of stock as an acknowledgment of their beauty and generous buying. Indeed, not until after he has done this will they think of diving into their canoes. And, too, he must be good to the children. Nothing less than several pounds of gumdrops will still their cries. In short, the skipper's big-heartedness is but one of the many invaluable secrets of successful Marshall Island trading.

When first you thought of your South Sea island, you saw at once its dusky monarch, didn't you? Some three or four hundred pounds of regal nakedness, he held his own with a hundred or more buxom lassies and an insatiable appetite for white-man flesh. I once wrote for this magazine the story of such a king, "Phanfo the Terrible," but he bossed a long way off in the black heart of the Solomon Islands, where head-hunting and other gentle pastimes are not for the duration of an hour.

Unfortunately South Sea kings, like their European brothers and cousins, are passing rapidly. In the Marshalls there are none. Only half a century ago, when each island of this group was a world of itself, every atoll boasted its king. Hilarious days were those, shipmate—long, pulsating periods of flame, when an American with piratical instincts, a strong arm and a cast-iron-lined belly was more welcome than a northeast trade!

Now the chiefs have been to the mission schools, so that they'll greet you in English, as they do most oversea friends. If you were of the islands, they would say, "*Yak we yuk!*" which means, "Love to you." This is an invariable greeting from man and woman.

If you do not object too strenuously, a chief will even slap you on the back and inquire about the affairs of the outside world. Don't take it to heart when you are asked to tell after what manner Santa Rosa's present mayor was put into his swivel chair. The Marshall Islanders are wonderful politicians; you will see for yourself soon enough.

Still there is another vital matter. Compose yourself for the great moment we roll down Main Street. You are going to meet "Chief Moses," along with his genial townsmen and women, done up in modern togs.

Time was when a chief tattooed himself from ears to toes. Today he sports a high collar and patent leathers. Which is another reason for the sorrowful decrease in the native population.

Likely as not we'll surprize Chief Moses in the largest house on Main Street, dictating a contract to his secretary, who manipulates a writing-machine that is even more ancient than the *Ancient Mariner!* You may blame the missionaries—if you will.

But you will hold in mind for me just one thing, won't you? Fifty years ago the Marshall Islanders warred constantly among themselves. Ever blue lagoons were streaked with blood, happy feeding-grounds for sharks and other wild things of the deep. Always little brown widows were left by the hundreds, a drug on the island market.

Now that at last you are in your first Marshall Island village, you will see that since that not too distant time the missionaries have taught these people much. Why, man, in a period of twenty years there has not been a murder in the Marshalls. And theft has almost disappeared. Still in the cities of our much vaunted civilization it is customary for men and women to shout that the Marshall Islanders are savages. To —— with this thing misnamed Civilization; in a short time, a very, very short time, I shall go back to Tahiti and my "savages." Oh, man, then I'll live once more!

Inculcated upon the minds of Marshall Islanders is that they must not smoke, dance or play cards. Too, many have learned to their dismay that to

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cook on Sunday only brings a reprimand that is as swift and forceful as an island storm. Equally wicked is one who remains out of doors after nine o'clock of a Saturday night.

And it is presumed that a Marshall Islander drinks nothing stronger than coconut-milk. But boys will be boys. So that you will overlook the various relaxations they indulge in from time to time; that is, if you are a regular fellow.

On the whole then these islanders are a jolly and a hospitable people, even more so than their distant cousins, the Hawaiians. They just like to lie around the house all day, sing a dozen or two songs in the evening and then tumble off to dream of those long, pulsating days of flame heretofore mentioned. Indeed, so joyous are these boys and girls, that the Japanese have sent quite a few of them to Japan on sightseeing tours.

Some last words. When you clasp old Chief Moses' bony hand in yours within the next three or four minutes, he will without a doubt ask—

"What is happening in America?"

If you would keep in his good graces, *do not* reply in *bêche-de-mer*. Even though the dialect is understood in the group, the Marshall Islander prefers not to talk it; he is educated.

And when your talk becomes of the island world, your conversation swinging to the unsolvable mystery of the origin of its peoples, as all South Sea conversations inevitably swing, just put the soft pedal on the word kanaka. Though the Marshall Islanders, as well as their neighbors, the Caroline Islanders, are called kanakas, they are not of that low breed.

As for the resident agent you asked about back on the beach, you will find a Jap at the head of administrative affairs. He will frown upon you immediately should you so much as hint in an indirect way that you might remain as an overseer. He just doesn't want you, that's all. If you are wise, you will try a British group, say Fiji.

Of course you will go to a library when you get back home again and set the librarians to carrying out books on the Marshall Islands. Here are the names of a few that they might bring you:

"Marshall Islands" (in "Cruise of the *Janet Nicol*") by Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson.

"Marshall Islands" (in "Voyage of the *Nyanza*") by J. Cumming Dewar.

"Marshall Islands" (in "Through Atolls and Islands") by F. J. Moss.

"Marshall and Caroline Islands," by G. Wegener.

Now, shipmate, let us turn into this royal bungalow and give old Chief Moses the glad hand in true American fashion.

Training a Dog

A HANDFUL of hints from an expert who has been a dog-fancier for a generation:

Question:—"I have had a chance (accepted) to secure a good bulldog. That is, I call him a bulldog (unborn). Parents are very large, "stocky" dogs with black and brownish markings, something like the small Boston bulls. How shall I go about it to house-break the dog and make him stay home?

I just lost a beautiful white collie. Think he was shot chasing sheep. The collie is not a house or town dog in my opinion.

Is there any way to teach a dog to fight another? Not that I like dog-fights, but I do want this beast to 'clean up' if he has to."—H. J. Day, M. D., Harrisburg, S. D.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—The black and brownish markings of your dog are called brindle. The best way to make that dog stay home is with a little switch, whipping him each time he starts to follow. Fix an imaginary line or definite line somewhere and never let him come beyond it without being called. The secret of handling a dog is from the first to use what word of command you use in a low tone and never confuse with an abundance of cuss words. He will learn it quickly.

To teach a dog to fight: Get two dogs together. Have some one hold the other and if possible in some manner cause him to snap at it while rubbing muzzles; or pinch ears to give the same impression. If there is any fight in either one it will come to the surface. The old manner was to twist their tails.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

The Klondike Gold-Rush

A "RUSH" that took nearly two years to get under full headway; but when it got going—oh, my!

Question:—"What is the oldest stamping-mill on the Alaskan coasts, and when was it established; and is it running, or when did it cease?

What was the year that gold was discovered in the Klondike? And when was the big rush there?

Where did the rush mostly land? From ocean steamer? And when the prospectors overtopped the mountain range, where was it that they took the steamboat *en route* to the Klondike or the place that they killed so many horses just previous to taking the steamboat?

Where did the steamboat run from, and to?

What year did the Government build the Alaskan Railway, and from what point did it run, and where to? And when were the worst months for snow-slides to bury the men working on it?"—Dr. H. B. Moore, San Diego, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—I do not know for certain which was the oldest stamp-mill. Do not use the word "stamping," by the way. While the stamps do stamping, the mine phrase, used by all engineers, manufacturers and the like, is stamp-mill; that is, one composed of stamps—a forty-stamp or a two-hundred-stamp mill (never heard of such a big one though).

I imagine the Treadwell mill was if not the first certainly the first important and best known one. That is at Treadwell, near Douglas, near Juneau and comprised, before they were shut down, a group of five mines, with one shaft, at least, nine thousand feet deep, as an old employee happened to tell me day before yesterday. There are few stamp-mills in Alaska, as quartz gold-mining has never been an important industry save for the group mentioned.

Gold was discovered by George Carmack in the Klondike on Bonanza Creek about August, 1896, with his friend Skookum Jim, Indian. He told miners of it, these having done a little prospecting

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above Circle, Eagle, Forty-Mile and such small settlements down the river in American territory.

They rushed up in the Fall of 1896; but no news to speak of—authentic news—reached civilization until the Spring of '97, when the men carrying the big pokes of gold reached Seattle.

The rush began in the Summer of 1897, and that was the year men tried to get pack-animals over the White Pass from Skaguay and killed so many. Perhaps ten thousand or so went in in 1897. But the big rush was the next year—that Winter and Spring and Summer of '98—big outfits planned in the Fall, Winter and Spring. They went by boat and by trail, from the mouth and from the head of the river.

There were many routes to Dawson, such as by the Stickine, and the Edmonton route, Copper River, etc., but all long and impracticable except to the most hardy, except the up-river trip—ocean steamer to St. Michael and then river boats up the Yukon to all the river settlements—and the Lynn Canal approaches.

Here was the romance. At the head of Lynn Canal, close together, were two landing-points, Dyea and Skaguay. The former led up to the Chilcoot Pass, over which it was impracticable to take animals. Prople packed on their backs their outfits on the last steep grade, sledding to it and from it down the other side to the little lakes, and reaching the navigable lake, Lake Bennett, head of navigation on that branch of the Yukon, and on down to Dawson.

The other point, Skaguay, led to the White Pass, practicable for animals, but, especially in '97, very rough and boggy. In the Fall they rushed in, killing animals. I went in in the Spring of '98 over the snow route, but as it melted in May we saw many remains of the dead pack-animals of the Fall before. White Pass led directly down to Lake Bennett, there joining the other route. We built boats on Bennett.

It was not until the Spring of 1899 that steamer routes were established on the upper Yukon, and these plied only between the main river and the White Horse Rapids, there connecting with the railroad which was built from Skaguay over the White Pass to White Horse, a hundred miles or more down the lakes.

The Alaska Railroad was begun only a few years ago and finished last Spring. It runs from Anchorage on Prince William's Sound over the Alaska Range and down a branch of the Tanana River to Fairbanks.

The snow-slides were on other short railroads near the coast in the cañon and glacier country about Valdez—and years ago. Nothing of that sort has characterized the building of the Government railroad. It isn't that sort of country. Snowslides usually occur either in early Winter or before the breakup, and only on unstable mountainsides.

If you want an answer, read the rules.

White Coolies

IS IT possible that the "average high" income in Germany is only about a dollar a month?

Question:—"I take your name from *Adventure* magazine as correspondent for matters relating to Germany, and as such would appreciate any information you may be able to give me on the following points:

German marks are now very much depreciated in terms of the dollar, but probably the internal value of the mark has not sunk nearly as low as its external value. Such being the case from some slight information I have been able to gather, it would appear that any one could live in Germany on a very small income in dollars. Is this correct?

If so, about what income in marks would be necessary to enable one to live at about the scale that one might live on an income of $5,000 in Canada or the States?

In view of our having been former enemies of Germany, would one find one's self at any great disadvantage in living there if one minded his own business and left matters relating to the war out of discussions?

Is the proposition to go to Germany and live from one's income from investments as suggested above to be recommended, or are there drawbacks in the way of taxes or otherwise to make the proposal impractical?

Are there any opportunities for one with a little capital to become engaged in some business enterprise there?

What part of Germany would you suggest that one would be well advised to go to, first as a desirable place in which to live, and second as a place in which one might engage in business?

Being a lawyer, of course I could not make use of my profession there, but what lines do you think lie open to one with a business training?

I enclose a one-dollar (U. S.) bill, which will cover postage and leave enough for a few cigars on me. Generally any information which you may be able to give me along the foregoing lines will be much appreciated.

I had a friend who last Spring went to Germany for a few weeks' visit, and he returned with the information that one might live there comfortably on an income of $300 a year and that $500 yearly provided an affluential income. Was his observation wrong?"—J. H. Flett, Welland, Ont., Can.

Answer, by Mr. Fleischer:—As you will perceive from the letter-head, the service to readers is free, and the only obligation on the part of the inquirer is a self-addressed, stamped envelop. Thanks, nevertheless, for the dollar bill on behalf of the Near East Relief; some poor child will benefit by your generosity and the fact that I don't smoke cigars.

You are quite correct in thinking that the mark has an internal value—which, however, is much greater for the native than for the foreigner living within the republic. How far a small income in dollars will go in Germany depends on where and how you live. You can spend just as much over there, in dollars, as you can over here. It is a fact that one can live like a prince on about $500 a year.

To judge from the average income of the German middle class, the equivalent of the above amount (U. S.), or two million marks, is just about fifty times what the German *pater* earns and has to support his large family on. Marks 50,000 is the average "high" income over there. It is ample; and many earn much less, but live on it. You can not compare an income of $5,000 in Canada or

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the U. S. with an equivalent of that sum in marks, but pre-war standards might be used in comparison. Then an income of 5,000 marks a year had the same purchasing value as that of an equal amount of dollars. Today you might live on 50,000 marks on the same scale as you would on $5,000 over here.

From my informants I gather that there does not exist today any ill feeling toward ex-enemies, excepting the French. Possibly the amount of hate bestowed upon the French leaves no balance for their former allies.

Any one living in Germany is subject to personal-income and commercial taxes. If you are in business over there you pay the same taxes as the Germans do.

There is hardly a commercial branch not represented in Germany. They make everything and do everything and export a lot. How much chance is there for an outsider, especially a foreigner, to horn in? I regret that I am unable to give you information regarding investments.

I do not believe that such advice comes under my jurisdiction. Supposing I do and you go wrong? However, if you care to invest in business, see your German consul at Toronto. He can advise you.

Although Berlin is all right, I'd prefer Dresden, Leipzig or Frankfurt on the Main. Living is more agreeable and business opportunities more numerous.

Unless you tell me for what kind of business you are equipped aside from getting people convicted, I hardly can advise you. As a lawyer you can not practise. But you know that.

Your friend's observations were correct, because they have been confirmed by recent arrivals from Germany. At the present time a dollar counts Mks. 4,000.* That's quite an amount over there. Prices, of course have gone up considerably, and foreigners have been required to pay *Valuta-Ausgleich*, which might be translated as leveling of exchange. In other words from 200 to 300 per cent. have been added to the purchase value of each article. The same holds good for prices in hotels and restaurants. Foreigners pay more because they come from "strong-exchange" countries.

If you want my personal opinion I'd say stay away. Unless you are well introduced and speak the language fluently, you will be regarded as unwelcome competition; and as you are practically going to a new country, politically speaking, you would have hard sledding. The only thing I can see would be to back up some going concern with good Canadian dollars, if upon investigation you would feel that your investment is worth the return or *vice versa*.

Some prominent German told me not so long ago that unless the Treaty of Versailles is canceled or modified, there will be a bankrupt Germany. Whether they are unable to pay or don't want to pay is beyond me to say.

One thing is obvious, however. British statesmen have recognized the necessity of keeping Germany going. Her ruin would mean Bolshevism in central Europe and then—chaos. It remains to be seen what the next months will bring.

German currency is nothing but inflated paper. Their securities are worth less than nothing. Only her export commerce keeps her going. What the future holds no one can foretell. I wouldn't care even to guess.

I know of lots of people that merely live over there on incomes made in this country. Yes, living is cheap and the money goes much further over there. But—the money was made over here and it should be returned to this country and its purchase value should rotate over here. Whatever is purchased by it and with it helps foreigners instead of merchants of the country of its origin.

That's my opinion, for which you asked. If you disagree with me, I am sorry. I am always glad to give any information I have and can obtain for you. To act on it is up to you.

*Written November 8, 1922. As this goes to press the day's quotation on marks is 20,000 to the dollar.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

FORDE, JOSEPH PATRICK. Last heard of in California. Please write to your brother.—Address FRANK FORDE, 272 Irving Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

DUNN, PAUL A. Last heard of in Louisville, Ky., where he registered for the last draft in Sept., 1918. Age about twenty-two, six feet tall; weight about 125 lbs., very light hair and blue eyes. May be working as a carpenter. Was employed as carpenter in the building of Camp Knox, Va. Any information will be appreciated.—Address P. J. DUNN, care of Disabled Veterans of World War Club, 231 South Hill St., Los Angeles, Calif.

WOMBLE, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN. Last heard of in Oklahoma City, Okla., in 1911 or 1912. Would like to hear from him or any of his family or immediate relatives.—Address A. A. OGLE, R 8, Box 22, Oklahoma City, Okla.

PRIEST, FRANCIS E. or Julia Priest (née Julie Dupious). Francis Priest was born and last heard of in Canada. Julia Dupious was born in Chicopee, Mass. Any information will be appreciated by their son.—Address EDWARD J. PRIEST, 15th Co., C. A. C., Fort Randolph, Canal Zone, Panama or Box 11, Barrowsville, Mass.

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HUTLER, REGINALD. Last heard of in Jersey City, December, 1921. Important news to his advantage by writing.—Address C. BLEASDALEY, Walford, Lunenburg Co., N. S.

CORNISH, CHARLES, Jr. Heir of the late Charles T. Cornish. Kindly communicate with McCoy & Hansen, Attorneys, 810 Torrey Bldg., Duluth, Minn.

McGUIRE, BENJAMIN. Last heard of was at San Francisco, Calif., with E. F. Hutton & Co., brokers. If you see this drop me a line.—Address C. G. COULTER, U. S. Naval Radio Station, Los Banos, Laguna, P. I.

LATCHFORD, ED. Last heard of was at Casper, Wyoming, with C. B. & Q. R. R. If you see this Eddie drop me a line.—Address C. G. COULTER, U. S. Naval Radio Station, Los Banos, Laguna, P. I.

CONGER, "YANK," HARRIS, LOCKE, or any A. B.'s of "Buckeye State," who were on two trips with me to Honolulu. Would like to hear from you at once.—Address J. V. WELLS, S. S. *Wm. T. Herrin*, 79 New Montgomery St., San Francisco, Calif.

LAMB, FRANK. Last heard from was in St. Paul, Minn. Was discharged from the 302 Field Signal Bat. in May, 1918 at Fort Dodge, Iowa and spent several days at the home of a friend in Ottumwa, Iowa. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ARTHUR C. STEELE, 634 E. Second St., Casper, Wyoming.

RUSSELL, ROBERT LAWRENCE. Last heard from Sept. 13, 1921 at Rotterdam, Holland. Please write to me Larry. I am anxious to know if you are well and happy.—Address MRS. LULU RUSSELL LAIRD, 805 8th Ave., N. Phoenix, Arizona.

SMITH, LESTER M. Ex-Sgt. U. S. M. C. Formerly a recruiting officer Terre Haute, Indiana. Please write to your old buddy at once. Have some valuable information.—Address OTTO J. SLUSSER, U. S. Marines, care of Cora Slusser, 1005 Crawford St., Terre Haute, Ind.

SIPLE, WILLIAM B. Ex-service man and American Legion officer. Last heard of in Philadelphia, Pa. Will any one knowing his present address kindly communicate with me.—Address R. H., care of *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

DICKSON, TED, JR. Last heard from was in Los Angeles, Calif. Please write your Los Angeles friend.—Address F. B. ABRAMS, Savannah, Ga.

L. L. L. I'm still the same and would like to hear from you soon.—Address MRS. E. P. L., Adams St., Springfield, Mass.

HAIGH, WARD PERCY. Formerly of Leeds and Nottingham, England. Left for Rhodesia, S. A. Your old friend would like to hear from you.—Address J. H. VICKERS, 1408 Dominion Bldg., Vancouver, B. C.

HENDERSON, HELEN. Please write to your mother. —Address MOTHER, 834 9th St., San Diego, Calif.

FROST, JAMES and J. HOPPING FROST. Father and son. Last heard of about seven years ago in Joliet, Illinois. James Frost is supposed to be in the South American Diamond Mines. Age about 80 years and formerly a resident of Middletown, Monmouth County, N. J. Write.—Address JOSEPH CAMPAGNE, P. O. Station A., Trenton, N. J.

GRADY, NELLIE MRS. (née Nellie McCarthy.) Last heard from in 1912 at No. 6 Warren St., Roxbury, Mass. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. M. A. SNYDER, 1046 W. 26th St., San Pedro, Calif.

HENNON, RALPH ("Bud"). Last heard of in 1908, at Southport, Indiana. Please write.—Address JAMES R. WELLS, 614 15th St., Modesto, Calif.

HANKS, MARION R. Write to your old buddy in Washington and give me your address. Card received from San Francisco. Same address.—CLIFFORD.

ELAM, RICHARD. Or any of his relatives. Last heard of in or near Eagle Pass, Texas, 1915-16. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WILLIAM A. ELAM, Naval Hospital, Mare Island, Calif.

ALLEN, PRESCOTT C. Last heard of at Salt Lake City, Dec., 12, 1921. Three letters returned Jan., 1922.—HAROLD.

TEXAS JACK, Slushy, Andy O'Brien, Kelly, Ted Leeds, Mike or any of the crew of the Bowhead Whaling Schooner *Era* which sailed from New Bedford, Mass., in August, 1906 and was lost off St. Pierre Miquelon, Newfoundland.—Address E. RICHARDS, 71 Cheny St., Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

THE following have been inquired for in either the February 28th or March 20th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine.

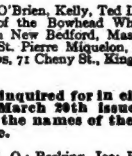
BAILEY, EDGAR T.; Bartell, O.; Berking, Joe; Blain, Harold P.; Bradford, Robert and Lewis; Brown, Carl A.; Crisp, Lizzie; Farmer, Frank D.; Gilday, John E.; Grasme, Erwin; Graves, James Franklin; Gray, Harry; Hicks, Ester; Kilian, Gustave; Lindsey, Percy; Lucas, J. A.; MacDonald, Malcolm; McCarthy, R. N.; McCulrey, T. J.; McPee or Goodier; O'Rourke, Edward; Richards, Frank; "Sake" Evan J.; Seney, A.; Skinner, James H.; Smith, Charles; Swiatkowski, William J.; Van Dyke, Peter; Vanderbeck, Andrew W.; Wagoner, Harry R.; Williams, Joe; Williams, Grant B.;

MISCELLANEOUS—Els; J. C. S.; L. W.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 20th and July 20th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

APRIL 20TH ISSUE



THE DADDY OF EIGHT HUNDRED *Charles Victor Fischer*
There was a thief on board the cruiser *Farallone*.

THE FLAW IN GREENBIE *Hubert Roussel*
He did something more than dive for shell.

DRUMS OF DOOM *Douglas M. Dold*
Native signals throb a warning in the African jungle.

THE NINE UNKNOWN A Five-Part Story Part IV *Talbot Mundy*
Gold is not money—it is *energy*.

OLD JOE BREAKS FAITH *Lynn Montross*
A night of frozen terror on the Great Lakes.

A TRANSACTION IN HEADS An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali
One head is better than two when it decorates the gates of the city. *George E. Holt*

GROAN O' THE GALLOWS Pirate Tales from the Law-Green *Arthur M. Harris*
When all Scotland got sore.

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The Lariat

A Novel of the West—by Honoré Willsie

EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE is going to publish this story of Hugh Stewart, a young paleontologist who dedicated his life to searching in the Old Sioux Tract for fossils of centuries ago. Red Wolf, the old Indian, and Fred Allward, the gray-bearded miner, were his friends and helpers. He needed no more in life. But the day he checked the onrush of a fear-maddened herd of wild horses in the presence of the powerful political leaders of his state, the battle for his future career began. A powerful story this; and one that every lover of adventure will enjoy.

Read "The Lariat" in the current issue of Everybody's

"JUDITH OF THE GODLESS VALLEY," by Honoré Willsie, is one of the best sellers this year. It appeared in *Everybody's Magazine* before it came out in book form, and *Everybody's* subscribers were the first to read it. Be one of the first to read her new novel in

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